



CRISIS OF FAITH IN JOHN UPDIKE'S SELECT NOVELS

**ABSTRACT
OF THE
THESIS**

SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF

Doctor of Philosophy

**IN
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

**By
SUMBUL**

**Under the supervision of
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ABSTRACT

The present thesis is on the topic “Crisis of Faith” in John Updike’s Select Novels.” It comprises of chapters namely “Disintegration of Values in American Society”, “Faith Lost”, “Faith Regained” and “In the Name of Faith” along with “Introduction” and “Conclusion”. My work is based on selective but representative novels of John Updike. It starts with the discussion of faith, establishing the fact that faith is an important theme in Updike’s fiction. He stresses the fact that faith is quintessential for life because it acts as a support system for mankind.

The term faith has wide connotations. First and foremost is of course ecclesiastical faith. If we talk about religious faith, then faith is the basic tenet of every religion. Faith is a conviction based on our relationship with God. Recent trends have led to a global decline in faith. When it comes to relationships faith comes to be known as trust and becomes synonymous with loyalty also.

Updike was a writer both evident and abashed in his willingness to engage God as a narrative presence in the midst of contemporary despair. Updike deals with the subject of faith in his novels but the term does not remain confined to ecclesiastical faith. He also talks about faith in relationships. As far as religious faith is concerned, Updike describes how and why faith is lost by the protagonists and whether it is ever regained by them. Much advertence has been given to the role of church in the lives of the characters.

The winner of Pulitzer Prize and various other accolades, Updike is a prodigious, prolific American author who has contributed not only short and long works of fiction but also poetry and criticism to American literature. His themes

include nostalgia, marriage, infidelity, America, disintegration of value system and most importantly faith as a ubiquitous element in human lives that the author chooses to describe. Endowed with an alert thinking and inquisitively probing mind Updike underwent the angst of spiritual crisis, therefore, has aptly presented loss of faith and revival of faith in his novels. He has limned characters that are caught up in the glamour of the world around them or they are involved in scientific enquiry so much that they end up losing their faith. There are also those characters that abandon everything for the pursuit of spiritual satisfaction and the experience of regeneration of faith.

His moral and theological vision which is clearly depicted in his writing is inspired by Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. In his novels God act as a *totaliter aliter* i.e. Wholly Other. That is to say God becomes a non-intervening deity. God becomes responsible by His inaction. God does not interfere in worldly affairs and therefore characters hold God responsible for letting the mishap occur, which stirs doubts in their minds.

Updike through his novels and characters tries to talk about existential philosophy. In other words he talks about meaninglessness of life and the angst that the characters suffer from.

Life of Updike's characters is based on the philosophy of the Absurd. They feel trapped. They find themselves in a cage from where there is no way out. They suffer from guilt because of their mistakes and sins. They feel they are in an alien world. At this stage of human predicament they do not find any Divine Mercy or Divine Rescue. Deprived of Divine Help they turn towards experimentalism and scientific truth which affects their faith in God.

The protagonists like Harry Rabbit Angstrom have existential approach. He feels he is an individual above all and he should do what he wants. He should be true to his own self. He can be compared to Sisyphus, who does the meaningless task of pushing the rock again and again in order to complete a work that could give him a sense of fulfillment. This was his way of attaining freedom. Harry in his own way pursues freedom but ultimately it results in meaninglessness.

In the Introduction, there is an appraisal of Updike as a novelist of great merit and a reading of his masterpieces such as Rabbit Tetralogy which comprises of *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*. Other novels are *S*, *Terrorist*, *A Month of Sundays*, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, *The Poorhouse Fair*, *Of the Farm* and *The Witches of Eastwick*. Religious atmosphere pervades throughout his literary oeuvre against which his characters think and act. The theme of faith is presented in each novel differently; each presenting a different case and nuanced complexity. His novels seem to function in religious modes and by necessity, address the problems that we might call “theological.” Updike is sanguine about his spiritually restless characters.

The first chapter “Disintegration of Values” takes into consideration novels such as *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *Rabbit at Rest*, *A Month of Sundays*, *Terrorist* and *The Witches of Eastwick*. The chapter is a discussion on morals, ethics, value system, erosion of values and its aftermaths.

The second chapter “Faith Lost” deals with novels like *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *A Month of Sundays*, *Terrorist*, *S* and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. In this chapter I have discussed loss of faith and its causes. It is depicted how doubts may assail people with strong faith and how gradually doubts deplete faith. Updike is known for

dark yet lively portrayal of spiritual dilemma and eventual loss of faith his characters suffer from.

The third chapter “Faith Regained” takes into account the novels such as *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *Of the Farm*, *The Poorhouse Fair*, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, *S* and *Terrorist*. It is shown how the lost faith in God is regained by the characters and how the broken families are reunited and how the sanctity of marriage is saved from being ruined with the help of some optimism. It can be inferred that the protagonists in the novels are in constant search of faith as some basic sense of security and optimism which keeps them alive; whatever may be the reason of their loss of faith.

The fourth chapter “In the Name of Faith” deals with the subject of extremities and atrocities carried out for the sake of faith. It takes into consideration the two novels *Terrorist* and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. The lives of the two characters Ahmad and Clark are traced in the chapter. It is shown how the search of meaning or the attempt to fill the void in their lives leads them towards sinister guides who misuse their innocence and betray them. Ahmad and Clark are brainwashed in the name of faith by Shaikh Rashid and Jesse Smith respectively. However, towards the climax both Ahmad and Clark happen to choose the right path and are saved from turning into destructive forces.

The Conclusion drawn after all these chapters is that the other themes like disintegration of values and breakdown of institution of marriage act as sub-themes for the major theme of crisis of faith. The issues he takes up in his novels are presented as they are. It is left to the readers to infer what they want to. The purpose of his works is to engage readers in a dialectical debate on the issue of faith. Nothing

is forced upon the readers because Updike is set out to write and not to preach. Another conclusion that can be derived is that in this materialistic world, solace can be found only in faith, be it faith in human relationships, human goodness or God's presence. The characters find themselves troubled externally as well as internally till they undergo resurgence of faith. Updike through his novels makes an impassioned call for a return to faith which is indirect and profound.



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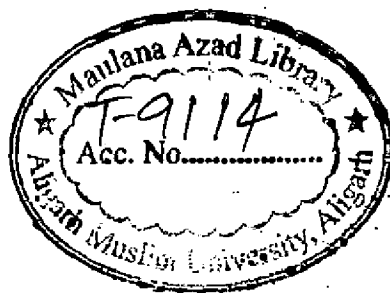
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2013**





11 NOV 2014



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*Dedicated
To My
Family*

THESIS



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Date...19.9.13.....

Certificate

This is to certify that *Ms. Sumbul* has completed her Ph.D. thesis entitled "*Crisis of Faith in John Updike's Select Novels*" under my supervision. It is an independent and original piece of research work carried out by the candidate. This research work has not been submitted, in part or full, to any university/institution for any degree. I find it suitable for submission for the award of the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy in English*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aysha", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Dr. Aysha Munira Rasheed
(Supervisor)

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Preface

The topic of this thesis is “Crisis of Faith” in John Updike’s select novels.” It comprises of chapters namely “Disintegration of Values in American Society”, “Faith Lost”, “Faith Regained” and “In the Name of Faith” along with “Introduction” and “Conclusion”. My work is based on selective but representative novels of John Updike. Since the topic is “Crisis of Faith” so I would like to begin by defining faith.

The term faith has wide connotations. First and foremost is of course ecclesiastical faith. Faith is the basic tenet of every religion. Faith is an integral aspect of relationships. Recent trends have led to a global decline in faith.

Updike was a writer both evident and abashed in his willingness to engage God as a narrative presence in the midst of contemporary despair. Updike deals with the subject of faith in his novels but the term does not remain confined to religious faith. He also talks about faith in relationships. As far as religious faith is concerned, Updike describes how and why faith is lost by the protagonists and whether it is ever regained by them. Much advertence has been given to the role of church. The winner of Pulitzer Prize and various other accolades, Updike is a prodigious, prolific American author. His themes include nostalgia, marriage, infidelity, America, disintegration of value system and most importantly faith. Updike underwent the angst of spiritual crisis and therefore he has aptly presented loss of faith and revival of faith in his novels.

In his novels, God does not interfere in worldly affairs and therefore characters hold God responsible for letting the mishap occur. As a result they sometimes lose their faith.

In the Introduction I have talked about Updike as a novelist of great merit and about his masterpieces. And I have traced how the theme of faith is presented in each novel differently.

The first chapter discusses morals, ethics, value system, erosion of values and its aftermaths.

The second chapter portrays how doubts assail even people with strong faith and how gradually doubts overcome faith. Updike beautifully portrays the spiritual dilemma of his characters and eventually the loss of faith.

The third chapter shows how the lost faith in God is regained by the characters and how the broken families are reunited and how the sanctity of marriage is saved from being ruined.

The fourth chapter shows how the search of meaning or the attempt to fill the void in the life can lead people towards sinister guides who misuse their innocence and betray them. At the same time applying rationality can save one from committing crime.

The Conclusion drawn after all these chapters is that the other themes like disintegration of values and breakdown of institution of marriage act as a camouflage for the major theme of crisis of faith. Another conclusion that can be derived is that in this materialistic world, solace can be found only in the faith in the spiritual world. The characters find themselves troubled externally and especially internally till they undergo resurgence of faith.

Documentation has been done following the guidelines of MLA 7th edition.

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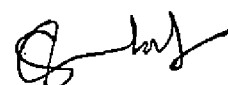
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(Sumbul)

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

John Hoyer Updike (1932-2009) was an American novelist, poet, short story writer, art and literary critic. Updike, a prolific, insightful, witty and a prodigious writer occupies an important position in the American literature. Updike is recognized as “one of the most thoughtful, most ambitious, most literate writers” (Reilly 217). Reilly further quotes Margaret Atwood’s observation that “as a writer he can do anything he wants.” Samuels observes, “BLESSED (sic) with multiple talents, prolific in their expression, John Updike is doubtless a prodigy. At a stage when most young writers have scarcely identified their strengths, Updike was already a seasoned professional” (5).

Updike has about thirty novels to his credit, most of which deal with the theme of faith either in relation to God or in relation to human beings in their interpersonal relationships and social contexts. Thereby, faith becomes an important thematic focus which should be explored with special analytical exercise in his fictive oeuvre.

It is a formidable task to define faith in a few words. It is a broad term which has centrality in almost all the religious traditions. In context of Christianity with which Updike’s work is often associated, it is “so central a term for Christians that it has come to mean many things. . . . It is thus a way of designating how a tradition shapes people’s lives in the world quite inclusively, and independently of the role that the word “faith” plays in their traditions” (Cobb 36). Faith in God is the first and foremost aspect of faith. How faith in the divine being is inherent in human lives, is demonstrated by Updike, based on the premise that, despite being “problematical”, “God” is an integral part of human vocabulary that “we do not have to look up in the dictionary. We seem to have its acquaintance from birth” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 228). Barth, one of the major influences on Updike, asks, “Is faith not the alpha and omega of what God expects and requires of man? Is it not the imperative of all Christian imperatives?” (38).

Humans are social beings and cannot live in isolation so much so that in the absence of human company they may direly need concept of some abstract or intangible being to have some support. This is a human need Updike emphasizes in

his words, “Being human cannot be borne alone. We need other presences. We need soft night noises – a mother speaking downstairs, a grandfather rumbling in response. . . . We need little clicks and sighs of a sustaining otherness. We need gods” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 233).

Updike’s fiction with faith as their thematic focus is just one aspect of his vast array of writings which include many genres. Therefore it is important to trace his literary journey to become the world renowned writer that now we know him as. Earl Rovit acknowledges Updike’s literary achievements: “He [Updike] has also managed to present himself as proficient, if not expert, in an astonishingly wide variety of disciplines ranging from geology to theology, from art and literary history to computer theory” (676). He initially worked for *The Harvard Lampoon* and *The New Yorker* for which he contributed poems, essays, cartoons and stories: an experience which “clearly sharpened his wit, his artist’s descriptive eye, and his sense of the essential ambiguity of life which resulted in an “astonishing quickness of his professional acceptance” (McCoy 12). Having graduated from Harvard and the *Lampoon* in June 1954, he gave his writing career a five year trial in Vermont with a borrowed typewriter. Soon he contributed his first professional story “Friends from Philadelphia” to the *New Yorker*. (McCoy 12)

Although most of his novels are bestsellers and won prizes and acclaim, at the same time, attracted a significant amount of criticism. Moser and West rightly point out, as already indicated, that “One of the most debated topics in Updike criticism is his engagement with Christian theology” (338). Confessing himself he points out, “A writer’s self-consciousness, for which he is much scorned, is really a mode of interestedness, that inevitably turns outward” (Updike “A Soft Spring Night in Shillington” 24). His works have been criticized for their sexist and racist content and elaborate style and verbosity. At the same time the waterfall of awards would serve as testament to Updike’s writing prowess. Updike won Guggenheim Fellow, Rosenthal Award, National Book Award, O. Henry Prize, National Book Critics Circle Award, Union League Club Abraham Lincoln Award, National Arts Club Medal of Honor, National Medal of Arts, William Dean Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, National Book Award Medal of Distinguished Contribution to American Letters, National Humanities Medal, American Academy of Arts and

Letters Gold Medal for Fiction etc. Apart from other innumerable laurels, he won Pulitzer Prize for Fiction two times for his novels *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*. Describing his career as something, upon which his existence depends, he says, “My own career – its dispersal and multiplication of the self through publication, its daily excretion of yet more words, the eventual reifying of those words into books – certainly is a practical consolation, a kind of bicycle which, if I ever to stop pedaling, would dump me flat on my side” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 228).

Updike was the son of Wesley Russell Updike and Linda Grace Hoyer. He was born in Reading, Pennsylvania. Updike was born in 1932 and was raised in Shillington, Pennsylvania, by both parents and grandparents. The poor family was supported only by his father’s teaching at Shillington High School. As they were well educated, they focused their hopes on their only child, who showed an early aptitude in art. After moving outside Shillington, Updike focused on his drawing and writing talents. (Uphaus 8)

Updike’s first inspiration was his mother’s writings. Before attending Harvard, He graduated from Shillington High School. It was Updike’s mother’s determination that sent him to Harvard. The places where he lived served as the setting for most of his works. He has a deep love for Shillington. In his unique style, he says, “. . . the time spent anywhere in Shillington – was delicious” (Updike “A Soft Night in Shillington” 8). At a later place he mentions, “My own deepest sense of self has to do with Shillington, and . . . the scent or breadth of Christmas. I become exhilarated in Shillington, as if my self is being given a bath in its own essence” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 220). Updike married twice. Updike moved to Ipswich, Massachusetts, to become a novelist where, with his first novel *The Poorhouse Fair* (1958) to his last novel *The Widows of Eastwick* (2008), he completed his long and illustrious journey as a novelist. He spent his last days in Massachusetts. Updike died of lung cancer when he was 76 in 2009.

Updike has been a source of inspiration for many budding writers. His themes, his character delineation, his choice of vocabulary all keeps the reader spellbound until s/he reads the whole of the novel. “John Updike . . . is also regarded as a writer of manners with his suburban settings, domestic themes, reflections of ennui and wistfulness, and, particularly, his fictional locales on the eastern seaboard of the

depression and general self esteem” (Dudley 61). Updike writes, “Religion enables us to ignore nothingness and get on with the jobs of life” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 228).

Updike’s novels deal with spiritual yearning of modern man and attempt to rediscover the sacramental dimension which is missing from human life. He writes of God as a kind of human optimism that, “. . . God is a dark sphere enclosing the pinpoint of our selves, an adamant bubble enclosing us, protecting us, enabling us to let go, to ride the waves of what is” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 229). He even says that, “God is the self projected onto reality by our natural and necessary optimism” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 218). All this shows Updike’s belief in the existence of God. He writes, “Early in my adolescence, trapped within the airtight case for atheism, I made this logical formulation: If God does not exist. The world is a horror show. The world is not a horror show. Therefore, God exists” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 229-230). Updike talks of God in a slightly different way. “This God is essentially, Updike’s God – serene, unprovable, impervious to all scientific evidence that might otherwise diminish the possibility of His existence. This God also gives Updike the “creaturely freedom,” not to mention the artistic freedom, he clearly desires as both a sensuous lover of earthly creation and a serious, realistic writer of the post-Christian world” (Boswell “Updike, religion, and the novel of moral debate” 46). Updike’s objective is to discover those ideas that have led to man’s loss of faith. The feeling of uncertainty about the existence God means that man has lost something which gives depth and purpose to his everyday life.

Dealing with faith as discussed in the context of Updike’s novels, this thesis comprises four chapters namely “Disintegration of Values,” “Faith Lost,” “Faith Regained” and “In the Name of Faith” along with “Introduction” and “Conclusion.” My work is based on selective but thematically relevant and representative novels of John Updike. His protagonists undergo disintegration of values and erosion of faith with instances of restoration of the lost faith in a few cases. Updike sanguinely portrays his spiritually restless characters.

The first chapter “Disintegration of Values” takes into consideration novels such as *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *Rabbit at Rest*, *A Month of*

Sundays, Terrorist and *The Witches of Eastwick*. This chapter attempts to discuss morals, ethics, value system, erosion of values and its aftermaths.

The second chapter "Faith Lost" deals with novels like *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *A Month of Sundays*, *Terrorist*, *S.* and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. This chapter is an attempt to see the process and causes of loss of faith. It is depicted how doubts may assail even those characters, who apparently have strong faith or have their lives dependent on selling faith as an attractive uplifting commodity, eventually end up losing faith. Updike beautifully portrays the spiritual dilemma of his characters and eventually the loss of faith as loss of human optimism at a close encounter with harsh realities of life.

The third chapter "Faith Regained" takes into account the novels such as *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich*, *Of the Farm*, *The Poorhouse Fair*, *In the Beauty of the Lilies* and *S.* It is discussed how faith is restored, however weekly and partially, to effect reunification of broken families.

The fourth chapter "In the Name of Faith" deals with the subject of extremities and atrocities carried out in the name of faith. It takes into consideration the two novels *Terrorist* and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. The lives of two characters Ahmad and Clark are traced in the chapter. It is shown how the search of meaning or the attempt to fill a void in their lives leads them towards malevolent guides who misuse their innocence and betray them. Ahmad and Clark are brainwashed in the name of faith by Sheikh Rashid and Jesse Smith respectively. However towards the climax both Ahmad and Clark choose the right path and are saved from turning into destructive forces.

I have tried to shed light on one of the most important thematic underpinnings in Updike's novels, which is Crisis of Faith. Although the theme of faith in Updike's fiction has been worked on quite a few times, yet the topic remains inexhaustible. His novels depict the old unquestioning and unwavering ecclesiastical faith versus modern skeptical thinking based on scientific knowledge. The major themes of religion, marriage, adultery and love act as a camouflage for the theme of crisis of faith. Faith in him undergoes a lot of intellectual enquiry and emotional turbulence. "Faith is an issue in Updike's fiction because it is an issue in his own life" (Coates 242). "Like the

figures in his fiction, however, belief is not easy for him; there is a strong intellectual wrestling, and institutions are of little help” (Coates 242).

References to some religious philosophers are found in Updike’s immense corpus as he was deeply influenced by them, which necessitates their examination. “At the conclusion of his autobiographical poem *Midpoint* . . . Updike “catalogues his heroes,” and the first two singled out for special praise are the Protestant theologians Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth” (Hunt 13). Their dialectical thinking serves as springboard and model for Updike’s own unique dialectical, existential, theological and aesthetic vision.

Updike has been immensely under the influence of Kierkegaard’s ideas. “So great has been the influence of Kierkegaard on modern religious thought that no theologian in the twentieth century could have done his work in ignorance of Kierkegaard’s ideas” (Idinopolous 58). He has his own way of dealing with the subject of faith. “Kierkegaard accepts the Kantian move and proceeds to make faith, not knowledge, the highest attainment of the human subject. Faith in its most salient form, is the highest attainment of the human subject” (Pojman 70). “No one writes more passionately about faith nor values it more highly. Whereas his predecessor have largely viewed faith as a necessary evil, a distant second to knowledge, Kierkegaard reverses the order. For him faith is the highest virtue” (Pojman 71). For him, “Faith is the soul’s deepest yearnings and hopes, which the rational part of us cannot fathom” (Pojman 71). Most of Updike’s protagonists continue their spiritual search and are not discouraged by the uncertainty or the risk involved in the journey. “Kierkegaard speaks of the risk of faith which causes one to venture forth in spite of uncertainty. Without risk faith is impossible. One comes to faith only when all other hopes fail. Hoping is faith in its profoundest sense” (Pojman 71). What can be concluded of Kierkegaard’s notion of faith is that, “Kierkegaard never developed his concepts in detail, but the twist and turn he gives to the notions of faith are original and often insightful” (Pojman 71).

Kierkegaard’s theology can be called as the theology of the Individual. His brilliant, varied and tremendous output of books is a result of his intense, unusual and perhaps neurotic emotional existence. He believes in the arduousness of Christian existence and in the sacrifice which God requires of the one who wishes to live by

faith. His aim was to restate the essence of Christianity. He says, "The truth of Christianity was in a word, faith" (Idinopolous 39).

There lies the difference between Kierkegaard's concept of faith and John Updike's characters' definition of faith. Whereas Kierkegaard says that faith is beyond reason, Updike's protagonists try to define faith with scientific enquiry. They try to find reason behind faith and as a result they fail and lose their faith. Clarence's case in the novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies* comes to mind as an apt example.

Another philosopher who needs to be mentioned when dealing with Updike's faith is Karl Barth. "Karl Barth is perhaps the most important figure in the transition of religious thought from the nineteenth to the first half of the twentieth century" (Idinopolous 59).

When the curtain is rung down on twentieth century and the annals of its church history are complete, there will surely be one name that will tower above all others in the field of theology — that of Karl Barth. In him a Church Father has walked among us, a theologian of such creative genius, prodigious productivity, and pervasive influence that his name is already being associated with that elite group of Christian thinkers that includes Athanasius, Augustine, Anselm, Aquinas, and Calvin. (Idinopolous 59-60)

Karl Barth also influenced Updike to a great extent. ". . . His neo-orthodox theology has proven down the years to be every bit as central to Updike's thinking as Kierkegaard's existentialist dialectic. Updike first began reading Barth in Ipswich, Massachusetts, while drafting *Rabbit Run*, and, according to his own account, the experience was as mind-altering as his first encounter, several years before, with Kierkegaard" (Boswell *John Updike's Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 15).

In his early writings Barth revealed a scheme of thought which reflected as no other the quality of man's experience in the twentieth century. Barth's ideas expressed a vitally new self-understanding for Western man generally, but particularly for the confessed Christian. These ideas have proven formative in

Protestant thought, and they have an increasing influence on Roman Catholic thought.” (Idinopolous 59)

Updike was also no less unaffected by Barth’s ideas. He mostly has borrowed Barth’s ideas from two or three primary texts the most important being *The Word of God and the Word of Man*. “From this work and others, Updike seized upon three central ideas from Barth’s theology: the dialectic of evil, the concept of “something and nothingness” and the argument for a serenely unprovable God” (Boswell *John Updike’s Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 16).

“Barth referred to God as the “Wholly Other”; the “righteousness of God” meant for him that God is utterly unlike anything in the world and, further, that none of man’s experiences could be utilized as a resource for knowing God” (Idinopolous 63). Hence God remains unintelligible.

“Barth argued that the knowledge of God which God himself vouchsafes to man in the situation of crisis is dialectical; it is simultaneously positive and negative” (Idinopolous 66). “The theology which Barth set forth brilliantly and dramatically in the *Epistle to the Romans* came to be called “crisis theology,” or “dialectical theology”” (Idinopolous 67), a theology that is dramatized in Updike’s fiction.

If one needs to understand the crisis in theology, one has to read Barth. “The present-day crisis in theology cannot be adequately grasped in its depth and complexity without recognizing both the conscious and unconscious influence of his ideas” (Idinopolous 88).

Barth’s “theology has two faces-the No and the Yes” (Schopen 524). Updike learns and modifies Barth’s dialectical theology. “Theologians may challenge Updike’s analysis, especially his emphasis on the “No” aspect of Barth’s thought. But what is important is not whether Updike has precisely synopsized Barthian theology but that he has given *his* interpretation of it: . . . the theology sketched . . . is not Barth’s, it is nevertheless Updike’s” (Schopen 524).

Updike himself says about Kierkegaard and Barth: “I decided I nevertheless *would* believe. I found a few authors, a very few . . . Kierkegaard, Karl Barth – who

helped me believe. Under the shelter . . . that I improvised from their pages I have lived my life” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever 230).

Moving from philosophical influence to America, John Updike’s novels depict America’s atrophied status in the modern world which is deprived of the cozy blanket of faith. It is a life which is thick-skinned in its situational contingencies. It can be said that:

. . . he is preternaturally alert to the dense blanket of topicality which swaddles his people, feeding them, shaping them, providing the very pungency of the air they breathe, and the sounds and sights that define their capacities of responsiveness. Popular music, tropical artifacts, current events, fashionable name-brands and styles provide the formative background of his fictional worlds.
(Rovit 680)

Updike’s literary oeuvre includes masterpieces such as *Rabbit Tetralogy*, *Rabbit Run*, *Rabbit Redux*, *Rabbit is Rich* and *Rabbit at Rest*. Other novels are *S*, *Terrorist*, *A Month of Sundays*, *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, *The Poorhouse Fair*, *Of the Farm* and *The Witches of Eastwick*. These are the novels which I have taken into account in my thesis because I find them thematically connected with reference to faith.

It is important to take the Rabbit series into account as it “[t]he thirty-year-long chronicle of Harry “Rabbit” Angstrom praises and indicts a culture uneasy with itself and its religion, demonstrating the consequences of an impossible but unyielding attempt to amalgamate God, redemption, and several American dreams” (Pasewark 1).

S. is a story of a woman at a critical juncture in her quest for faith. Sarah who is dissatisfied with her life mainly due to her husband’s attitude towards her goes out in search of spiritual satisfaction. She joins an ashram and finds herself happy and satisfied until she discovers that the ashram and its guru are fake. So at the end she quits the ashram.

Terrorist is about a teenage Arab-Irish-American boy who as a devout believer faces perhaps the biggest crisis of his life at the age of eighteen. It is about how his teacher misguides him in order to take undue advantage of his sincerity towards his religion. His invocation to the divine being for guidance and a positive faith saves him from becoming a terrorist.

In the Beauty of the Lilies is about a character who examines faith because of his excessive readings of scientific books and eventually ends up losing his faith. His son Teddy also does not have any faith because he feels that God did not help his father while his daughter Essie is a believer. Essie's son Clark joins a commune thinking it to be a religious place, soon he comes to know that he is trapped by fake people. To redeem himself he kills the head of the commune to save innocent people. Thus Clark becomes a martyr.

The Poorhouse Fair is about lack of understanding between the powerful and the common people. The novel is about a group of old people who live together and wait for the day when they have a fair. Their prefect is a young man who may be strict but is in no way a bad person. He always thinks about their welfare but they misunderstand him and blame him when the fair does not go well.

Of The Farm is about human relationships. The problems in the relationship of the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law affect the relationship of a mother and a son. And also to some extent affects the relationship between husband and wife. Towards the climax, especially after listening to a sermon in the church, the mother-in-law tries to understand her daughter-in-law and accepting her leads to the reunion of the family.

The Witches of Eastwick is about three supernatural beings who live like human beings among human beings. The witches show their magical powers when they are hurt and betrayed by a character. They even realize their fault and the story ends when the witches vanish and their existence, their tale only becomes a myth for the town where the story is set. *The Witches of Eastwick* is a ". . . unique book when Updike's religious polemic and his imagination of the natural otherness of particular human lives come into productive conflict" (Zias 197). "In Updike's seemingly anti-Christian affection for the witches in his novel, Bloom hails "a memorable vision of a

controlled male phantasmagoria that projects a sense of the radical otherness of all women”” (Zias 198).

A Month of Sundays is about a defrocked minister Tom Marshfield, who is caught between the urges of spirit and those of body. He is sent for treatment to a rehab center. The novel is self-confessional on part of the chief protagonist. Writing sermons and confessions is a part of his therapy. After the month is over he is to come back. After going through his entries from beginning to end, a difference in his attitude towards life can be noticed. It can be inferred that he is now alright and will not repeat the past mistakes. In other words, a spiritual reintegration is evident. “Marshfield must accept on faith that his morality or immorality is finally not an issue. Only belief matters” (Coates 154). *A Month of Sundays* is based on the dialectic of sex and religion. And the language used by Tom Marshfield also plays an important role in the novel. In fact the triad of sex, religion and language is remarkable.

In that memoir [“The Dogwood Tree: A Boyhood”] Updike discusses his boyhood fascination with what he called the “Three Great Secret Things: Sex, Religion, and Art” . . . these three secret things also characterize the predominant subject matter, thematic concerns and central questions found throughout his . . . fiction” (Hunt 2)

And the “. . . Three Great Secrets interweave, complement, and illuminate each other in each of his works” (Hunt 2).

Few critics would deny that these three “secrets” continue to be his . . . themes, and yet rarely has he integrated them so consistently as in *A Month of Sundays*. Throughout there is a triple-layered simultaneity of interaction; just as Marshfield’s “month may seem a metaphor,” so too explicit reference to one of the secrets implies a reciprocal reference to the other two . . . there are also several triple-layered thematic movements and symbols that reinforce this multiple interaction. (Hunt 185)

I have traced how the theme of faith is handled in each novel differently tracing complexity and nuances that Updike is capable of. It has been depicted that certainly faith in the divine being is the most important aspect of faith but faith also plays a crucial role when it comes to relationships. The failure of the characters to believe or to love does not rule out the possibility of faith and love as realities. If something isn't experienced by someone at one point of time does not preempt a future possibility of its occurrence. The graph of faith in human life is as changeable as human mind and psychological developments are, commensurate with the kind of exposure to various experiences in life a person has.

Faith serves many purposes. For Updike it gives him the reason to write. In an idealistic vein, Updike speaks:

What small faith I have has given me what artistic courage I have. My theory was that God already knows everything and cannot be shocked. And only truth is useful. Only truth can be built upon. From a higher, inhuman point of view, only truth, however harsh, is holy. The fabricated truth of poetry and fiction makes a shelter in which I feel safe, sheltered within interlaced plausibilities in the image of a real world for which I am not to blame. Such writing is in essence pure. Out of soiled and restless life, I have refined my books. (Updike "On Being a Self Forever 231)

With the movement from "soiled and restless life" to the essential purity of scriptural writings, Updike works as a writer with divine faith. Though, Updike's religious preoccupation is often criticized because critics sometimes try to build up Updike's personal theology from his writings. However, he himself said that he has never offered his works as "Christian art" (Coates 8).

The relation between Updike's Christianity and his novels is often misinterpreted.

While Updike has repeatedly expressed his views on religious and theological questions, his critics continue to interpret his work according to theories, religio-ethical systems, and ontologies he categorically rejects and his fiction does not embody. Updike's

faith is Christian, but it is one to which many of the assumptions about the Christian perspective do not apply - especially those which link Christian faith with an absolute and divinely ordered morality. (Schopen 523)

Therefore, in this thesis, I have not made attempts to establish link between his novels and some form of theology. What actually is aimed at is a search for the underlying yearning for faith and human optimism which may or may not be answered and satisfied. In demonstrating this, Updike instills in his protagonists the real human flaws. "He creates characters who cannot function well together sexually and who cannot practice a religious faith that permits meaningful interchange between man and God or even among members of the same confession" (Detweiler 610). Therefore, most of his fiction ". . . begin with love and end with parting and death, and as his work has developed, there is less and less likelihood that love will survive the indignities and betrayals and torpor that the progression will assure" (Rovit 679). As far as death is concerned he says, "Not only are selves conditioned but they die. Each day, we wake slightly altered, and the person we were yesterday is dead. So why, one could say, be afraid of death, when death comes all times" (Updike "On Being a Self Forever" 221).

Updike believes in afterlife as he writes, "Those who scoff at the Christian hope of an afterlife have on their side not only a mass of biological evidence knitting the self-consciousness mind tight to the perishing body but a certain moral superiority as well . . ." (Updike "On Being a Self Forever" 214). He believes that "The yearning for an afterlife is the opposite of selfish: it is love and praise for the world that we are privileged, in this complex interval of light, to witness and experience" (Updike "On Being a Self Forever" 217). And he further believes that "The immortality that we crave is a phenomenal immortality – it is the continuation of this present life" (Updike "On Being A Self Forever" 217).

Updike raises moral questions and complex issues of faith through his novels. His work shows how faith or lack thereof affects lives of characters in the novels. Updike is a writer whose vision of the world is enshrouded with religious experiences. ". . . John Updike is one of the few literary links with the historic Christian faith. His novels pry open the secret world of ministers . . . explore the relation between science

and religion . . . test the gospel against the pantheistic dreams of neo – Hinduism. . . .” (Coates 7-8).

“Updike, then, does not parade his faith, and he would eschew the label of “Christian writer.” . . . At the same time, he makes no attempt to hide or de-emphasize his faith” (Coates 9). “Certainly Updike does not preach Christian messages in his fiction . . .” (Coates 8). He rather seems to be exploring the issue of wavering and dwindling faith in the human world and condemns it as a cause of vacuity and lawlessness. His view of faith is unorthodox and non-pharisaic.

Updike’s fictive world may look dark due to loss of faith in many of the characters.

Thus, although nothingness may lurk as a dark possibility . . . throughout Updike’s fiction, Updike’s world is too substantial – and too filled with a sense of miracle – to be ultimately nihilistic. Updike seems, in other words, to be at least tentatively asserting the ontological solidity of Being – a genuine is-ness that defines the human self, giving it substance rather than nothingness, but that also transcends that self. (Neary 109)

Updike’s content and style are to be grasped with wit, intelligence and a latitudinarian attitude without having confusion between the two.

MUCH OF THE CRITICAL CONTROVERSY OVER (sic) John Updike’s writing seems to stem from the critic’s frequent inability to differentiate between what the author has to say and the method in which he imparts his ideas. In other words, particularly in Updike’s case, an implicit confusion of style and content makes assessment of actual literary contribution the more difficult. The confusion derives from the unconventionality of Updike’s baroque and microscopic style which appears itself to be a kind of subliminal end. (Gingher 97)

His style and range of expression are equally admired as much as the content that blends with each other harmoniously.

One cannot read John Updike and fail to be struck by his command and use of the English language . . . his words give pause: the breathtaking, lyric descriptions that capture a moment of human tenderness or magically bring a scene to life; the graphic, sometimes near-violent, passages about sex and sexuality, many of them couched in terms that had not previously found their way into serious writing. Always so stunning, always so right . . . Updike proves to be an astonishing literary talent. Another pleasure of reading John Updike involves enjoying the breadth of his learning. Although each of his works can be read on its own terms, again and again there is an invitation to do further exploring. (Reilly 217-218)

Robert S. Gingher in his article “Has John Updike Anything to Say?” answers the critics who blame Updike for the lack of content. “It strikes me that Updike . . . would hardly be so naïve or hopeful as to assume that exquisite style would obviate the necessity of dealing with universal truths” (98). He further adds,

. . . Updike does have a great deal to say. His fiction is indeed surcharge with hidden meaning To a greater degree than most of his contemporaries, Updike treats the larger issues in his fiction in the subsurface architectonics of his fiction. Several current studies of Updike’s fiction confirm the author’s artistic merit and conviction of purpose. (Gingher 99-100)

“Often, his characters have troubled souls, and Updike himself is deeply concerned with matters of religion . . .” (Samuels 10). Updike through his novels, trenchantly comments on the abraded condition of faith in contemporary America. Updike has given effective fictional dramatization to the crisis of faith in his novels.

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Chapter 1

Disintegration of Values in American Society

DISINTEGRATION OF VALUES IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Values can be classified into two largely overlapping classes: Altruistic values and Ceremonial values. (Quine 39) Altruism is unselfish concern for others. In other words altruism is selflessness. Ceremony involves pomp and formality. So, altruistic values are about happiness and satisfaction of others. On the other hand, ceremonial values are kind of rituals which people perform as a part of society or culture. Moral Values focus on questions of right and wrong. It is the standard by which people judge what is important, worthwhile and good. People receive moral education from many sources, including their family, church, friends, and teachers and even television.

Values exert major influence on the behavior of an individual and in some cases they may act as protocol. Ethics consist of fundamental issues of practical decision making, and its major concerns include the nature of ultimate values and the standards by which human actions can be judged right or wrong. ("ethics." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*).

Jerry Lopper in his article "Development of Personal Values: What Are Values and The Origin of Your Personal Code of Values" defines values as ' . . . deeply held beliefs that guide our behaviors and decisions. They reside deeply within the subconscious and are tightly integrated into the fabric of everyday living. People make decisions and choose behaviors, friends, employment, and entertainment based, in large part, on our values.'

Core values are assimilated by people during childhood from parents, teachers, coaches and others who are influential in life mostly found in the environment they live and are brought up in. In later years, as a result of critical thinking and life

experiences, one may discard some values and add others. Thus, rethinking of values is a lifelong process. However, values that operate subconsciously or the core values basically decide what feels right or wrong to us. What a person learns as a child thus has a strong impact on him which may not be unlearned or shed off quite easily.

Many a times the cause of a conflict between two persons is values. These arguments not necessarily occur between two entirely different persons from different backgrounds but also between friends, relatives and family. This gives rise to a question whether values are absolute? The answer to this is values are not absolute and universal. They are relative and specific to culture and time and even individual's thinking.

Every society creates ideal images of what the behavior in thought and action of its members should be. . . . These images, known and approved by the members of the society, give form to its values. A value is an ideal, a paradigm setting forth a desired and esteemed possible social reality. In essence, values are beliefs – beliefs that the idealized ways of living and acting are the best ways for the society. . . . In this role they become standards. (Gabriel 149)

Since values vary from society to society, behavior esteemed in one culture may be disapproved in another. It may happen that ways of some people may seem strange to someone from a different culture. Variation in moral values from culture to culture invites comparison. As civilizations evolve in the processes of history, values change. Since scientific logic is not used to explain and define morals, it is just not possible that what is right for one person will also be right for others. Values are always in the process of reformulation. Advanced societies subject them to continuous radical criticism. Nevertheless there are some evil acts which are too dark to be

justified and are therefore universally condemned throughout the world. There are some forms of behavior, no matter what the culture is, which are universally considered wrong.

Moral law was once thought to be God-given. It is supposed to be an institution for the common good. The moral law of a society, if successful, coordinates the actual scales of values of the individuals in such a way as to resolve incompatibilities and thus promote their overall satisfaction. In morality there is a general universal tendency to reach uniformity of moral values, so that the social members may count on one another's actions and rise in a body against a transgressor. In morality this uniformity is achieved by instruction, moral values being handed over from one generation to another. (Quine 41-42)

Each generation combines the tradition it has inherited from the past with the knowledge that springs from an experienced present to formulate and reformulate the values which guide the conduct of its members. . . . Other institutions, in particular those of religion, exhort and encourage the members of a society to make their behavior conform to its picture of good life. (Gabriel 149)

Conflicts and disagreements on moral matters can arise even within oneself. This sometimes leads to indecisiveness and confusion and later may result in regret and repentance. We judge the morality of an act by our moral standards.

It is found that, “. . . many philosophers have regarded ‘Why be moral?’ as an illegitimate question. But the weakness of this idea soon became apparent. For if it is not legitimate to ask why one should be moral, then presumably there can *be* no reason to be moral” (Baier 231). Morality is primarily a matter of what one does to

oneself, rather than what one does or does not do to others. In other words, virtue is truly its own reward which a person may choose to inculcate for her/his satisfaction.

Coming to the American context, it can be said that American values emerge from a tradition that originated in the ancient Middle East and in ancient Greece and Rome. Because of the common heritage of Western culture, the values of Americans derive ultimately from the same sources as do those of Europeans. Historically, American social values spring from the religious and humanistic strands in Western civilization.

America had been open to receive a variety of ideas and modes of thinking and living with immigrants from different parts of the world. The young nation has borrowed and imbibed a lot from the values and belief systems of almost all parts of the world. Nevertheless, a few selected values are at the core of the American value system. The one value that nearly every American values and is at the root of American cultural makeup is American Individualism. Whether it is called individual freedom, individualism, or independence, it is the cornerstone of American values. It includes respect for one's privacy also. However, the emphasis on one's right to happiness can be confusing. It allows children to disagree, even argue with their parents. While in many other cultures it may be taken as a sign of lack of love and respect, it is not the case in the United States. It is simply a part of developing one's independence.

Americans venerate individual liberty because liberty enables individuals to explore and develop fully the qualities, capabilities and strengths inside them and allow them to make their own choices in life so that they can live a life of respectability and can achieve what they want to. Thus, American value system,

broadly speaking, is based on Altruistic values, whereas ceremonial values can easily be shunned based on the concept of individualism.

It is not only freedom but law and order also which occupies an important place in the lives of the social members. They understand its need and follow it. They believe that only in the context of social order maintained by law can an individual live a full and significant life. The basic characteristic of the American culture is the fact that the Americans assert their freedom which is reflected in a diversity of opinions. Besides liberty, they lay emphasis on separate individualities of husband and wife and children. They have high regard for voluntary public service by private individuals.

So far as ceremonial value is concerned, Christianity and Church still play a role in the lives of Americans. Ideally speaking, many Americans try to practice what Christian ethics preach. D'Souza considers Christian ethics as most comprehensive as a value system. He says:

Christian ethics is, and has been throughout its history, essentially a theory of coordinated moral values. It has presented a type of life in which distinctive virtues are fundamental. These virtues have been experienced as supporting one another not only as constituents of individual character, but also as conducive to social welfare. The worst tragedies in human history have been due to the lack of possession of some of these virtues or to a failure to give them their due place or proper strength or universal range of influence. In the course of its history Christianity has included all virtues within its ethics. (266)

Christian ethics are important in itself but Christian ethics become more important in American context because majority of people there are Christians and try to practice Christianity especially in ceremonial forms. Therefore, Updike refers to Christianity again and again and his focus is on Christianity losing its foundation as a value system. Values are an integral part of any society. Updike's novels depict society's superficiality in human relations which in turn depicts decaying values. What is needed is self-analysis and self-assessment. Sometimes under peer pressure or social pressure people may behave in a fashion that may disregard good moral values necessary to keep the society happy as a whole.

American society has a wide ranging influence all over the world. Due to the fact that America at present is the superpower and due to the economic factors also America is a nation often followed by people all around the world. So disintegration of values that persists in American society creates an adverse effect on other societies also which try to emulate America. American society acts as an ideal or role model for other societies and is followed mostly by the newer generation not only in their dresses and food habits but also in the general mores that decide their behavior.

"The people filled with the spirit of Capitalism today tend to be indifferent, if not hostile to the Church. The thought of the pious boredom of paradise has little attraction for their active natures; religion appears to them as a means of drawing people away from labor in this world" (Weber 70). In Updike's novels this trend of indifference of the masses to the Church under the influence of consumerism promoted by Capitalism is evidence in the behavior and thoughts of important characters.

As far as Updike's novels are concerned, Updike's concern for values and nostalgia is clearly seen in the themes as well as in the characters. Spiritual crisis,

middle class morality, ethics form the major themes of Updike's novels. Updike depicts that institutions such as marriage, religion, family are shaken and are in constant jeopardy with the changing times in the American society.

“Religious traditions are complex. They often weave together the legal, poetic, moral, political, and narrative traditions from different cultures into complex new syntheses” (Browning 21). As far as the institution of marriage is concerned which witnesses, somehow, a simultaneous disintegration of values.

Debates on marriage today are deeply influenced by what Max Weber and Jürgen Habermas have called “modernization” — the spread of technical rationality into the social spheres of economics, law, sexuality, family, and marriage. In the United States, this takes the form of our no longer reasoning together about the common good, but merely expecting the marketplace to satisfy short-term individual wants and needs. The spread of technical rationality energizes a host of separations in the marital field — sex from marriage, marriage from childbirth, parenting from marriage, child rearing from marriage, and the workplace from family life. Some of these separations we value, but others we rightly are beginning to question. (Browning 20)

Marriage is a debatable topic as there are various opinions about it. “Legal historian John Witte documents that Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin appreciated the natural goods of marriage such as marital affection, procreation, kin altruism, conjugal sexual exchange, mutual assistance, and the development of a common stock of the goods of life” (Browning 21-22).

Another point of view is of Aquinas. "Aquinas defined matrimony as the joining of the male to the primordial mother-infant family" (Browning 22). It can be said that, "Aquinas view does not stay at the level of scriptural interpretation alone, but is also a product of reason" (Browning 23).

On the other hand, Luther's view regarding marriage is that,

Although marriage is mainly an estate of the earthly realm for which practical economic, health, and common good reasons can be advanced, the horizon of God's intention for marriage in creation hovers in the background. . . . At the economic level, he observed that married people retain a sound body, a good conscience, property, and honor and family. Nonmarital sex, out-of-wedlock births, and single parenthood can lead to poverty. . . .

In addition to its spiritual meaning marriage for Luther was a matter of good public policy. . . . (Browning 25)

In *Rabbit Is Rich* Reverend Campbell explains, "Marriage is not merely a rite; it is a sacrament, an invitation from God to participate in the divine. And the invitation is not for one moment only. Every day you share is meant to be sacramental . . . marriage was not to be entered into unadvisedly or lightly; but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God" (Updike *Rabbit Is Rich* 181).

"Classic Christian marriage texts link sexual desire, love, the birth of children, the raising of children, and the mutual assistance and enrichment of economic life into an integrated and mutually reinforcing whole known as the institution of marriage. We should resist modernity's tendency to split these apart" (Browning 20). In the novel *Rabbit Redux* marriage is shown as an amalgamation of these parts. Harry resist the tendency to split these apart.

In the novel *Rabbit Redux*, which is the second installment in the Rabbit series, extra-marital affairs are involved. As the name suggests the story revolves around the central character Harry Rabbit Angstrom. Harry has been given this name of Rabbit in his High School as he was a basketball star at that time. Harry's wife Janice is in relation with a man named Charlie, thus she hardly spends time at home. Harry says to Janice on the phone "... the kid and I were just wondering if and if so when the hell are we going to get a home-cooked meal around here" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 27). Rabbit takes care of his teenage son Nelson when Janice leaves home. Harry does not force his wife either to leave the house or to leave Charlie. His values are not such that may allow him to impose himself on anybody. This shows he believes in freedom and space and respects his wife's decision. At the same time he would have divorced Janice or would have annulled his marriage but he does not do so because he is a believer in individual freedom and he takes the matter casually.

Different relationships like that of husband and wife, father and son, mother and son, brother and sister are depicted along with the elements of patriotism and racism in this novel. Rabbit is white and pro-American. Freedom is extolled in America. What Harry says to Skeeter is an instance of Updike's wit and humor also. "This is the freest country around, make it if you can, if you can't, die gracefully. But Jesus stop begging for a free ride" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 208). Americans enjoy individual freedom even in their relationships, family and friends. This is clearly seen in case of Harry, Janice, Jill and Skeeter. For them individualism is equally important to relationships and family bonds and most of the time it is given precedence over the latter.

Harry himself practices individual freedom so far as relationships are concerned. One day Harry brings home two people, a white girl Jill and a black boy

Skeeter, Jill is a runaway from home and doesn't have any place to live so he brings her to stay with him. Jill is a runaway which again shows preference for extreme form of individual freedom at the cost of traditional values. Harry for the sake of helping a teenage girl gives her shelter. After a few days she calls Skeeter to live with them and Harry allows him also. Since Harry does not want to lose Jill, he accepts Skeeter. Jill loves Harry and they develop a relationship. The narrator says, "One of the nice things about having a lover, it makes you think about everything anew. The rest of your life becomes a kind of movie, flat and even rather funny" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 54). At the same time Skeeter and Jill also have physical relationship although it is reluctant participation on part of Jill and unlike with Harry there is no emotional attachment between Skeeter and Jill. Jill says to Harry, ". . . whatever men ask of me, I must give, I am not interested in holding anything for myself" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 191). Jill is a person with a different approach to morality. It is partially altruistic. This is her way of helping and making people happy. It seems she believes in primitive ways of civilization where all men and women were available for each other and there was no concept of marriage and restriction. That she does not believe in restrictions is already clear from her running away from home. Her relationship with Harry is out of love for him wherein Christian ethics are flouted.

As far as Skeeter is concerned he is no less than an evil person. Skeeter says to Jill, "Anything you do, do for selfish reasons" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 189). He himself is selfish, self-centered and materialistic and often asks others to do the same. He has never known any values. Jill and Nelson also share a good rapport.

Since the characters totally disregard family values, the institution of marriage is shaken when the spouses carry on with their liaison with others, the idea of home goes absent and the house is devastated which is a symbolic instance of a total

disintegration of family values. This is evidenced in case of Harry also as he carries on with his liaison with his neighbor and he loses his home.

Disintegration is witnessed in external world also when Harry's home burns which is a symbol of their disintegrating marriage. One day Harry and Nelson go out for a dinner at their neighbor's place. Harry was there till late night with his neighbor Peggy and suddenly Skeeter calls him and tells him something very bad has happened. Harry and Nelson come back and find their house burning. Jill dies in the fire. After sometime Harry finds Skeeter hiding in his car. He drops Skeeter wherever he wants. It was an act of arson. But who does it is not clear. The suspicious nature of the whole incident somehow points towards Skeeter but Harry does nothing to find the truth. Somebody's destructive mind results in such an incident. Undoubtedly lack of values is the motive. Now once again the father and the son are left alone and this time homeless too. They go to Harry's parents' house to stay. After sometime Harry loses his job also. The situation turns worse day by day. Harry's father says to him, "Things come in bunches, that's the mysterious truth. You lose your wife, you lose your house, you lose your job" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 303-304). Harry's sister Mim says to him, ". . . you like any disaster that might spring you free. You liked it when Janice left, you liked it when your house burned down" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 318). Mim here talks of Harry being free but is he free or is he all alone? From Mim's dialogues we can make out that in some way Harry is not that much affected with the loss as he should be. In fact, he is indifferent to the loss of spouse and house i.e. home. This attitude of Harry makes readers question if he really value these things, the idea of home or family? But it may be possible that his silence which is due to shock is mistaken as his indifference.

Mim acts as a positive force who tries to bring harmony into the couple's life. Mim tries to bring Harry and Janice together again. Harry does not ask for any favor. *It may be because he is not bothered. Mim decides to reunite them which shows she is among those who hold values important. Mim may appear a flirt to Harry and to the readers but she desires peace and harmony and thus tries her best to bring Janice and Harry together.*

Charlie doesn't believe in the institution of marriage. In a conversation with Janice, he makes fun of her marriage. "She laughed too, but it seemed a little hard of him to say, to make a joke of the marriage that was, after all, a part of her too" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 54). At heart Janice values marriage which makes her feel bad. Whether it is evident from her actions or not she still thinks of herself as somebody's wife. For her, house is a symbol of security. She still wants family life. Her values are not completely eroded. Mim intentionally starts seeing Charlie and this was obviously not liked by Janice. As a result Janice decides to leave him and come back to Harry. She calls Harry and asks him to meet her. They go for a drive and then go to a hotel where they booked the room in the name of Mr. and Mrs. Angstrom which is a sign of their reconciliation. After the phase of anarchy, at last harmony resurfaces. Hence the title *Redux* which means restoration. Harry says to Janice, "Confusion is local view of things working out in general" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 351). Harry thinks, "Her trip drowns babies; his burns girls. They were made for each other" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 342). With their imperfections, the couple has sense of belonging to each other.

Every individual faces a conflict between responsibility and desire and Harry is no exception. In the novel *Rabbit Run*, the first novel of the quartet, a fling outside the wedlock is shown. It is the story of Harry Rabbit Angstrom. Harry, who was once a star basketball player, now feels stuck up in a mediocre life with an alcoholic wife

whose only goal in life is to watch TV. Harry feels frustrated and decides to quit. And as the title itself suggests, he runs away from his pregnant, alcoholic wife and a little kid.

He does not leave his family only out of a lack of concern for their welfare. He leaves because he cannot tolerate the rigid boundaries of family life. "The family is not merely a source of security and mutual affection, but also a prison. Likewise, adultery is a multifarious set of experiences ranging from boredom and disgust to beauty and tenderness" (Ahearn 63-64). He absconds from the house. He meets a woman named Ruth and gets into live in relationship with her. Ideally speaking if he was not satisfied with his job or with his life he should have done something in order to improve the situation. He would have changed the job. He is fed up with Janice because she is an alcoholic and does nothing except watching TV and leaves her. He could have talked to her instead of abandoning everything and running away. A little sympathy may have made him understand her predicament. She too may be feeling trapped and caught up in her insipid life and that's why she turns into an alcoholic. He doesn't even think how will it affect Janice and Nelson. Harry is an escapist. Harry's desire to escape is a manifestation of his sickness of routine. His leaving his family and going to another woman depicts his lack of regard for values.

Harry is driven back home by his sense of responsibility when Janice is in labor. This shows that somewhere in his heart he believes that marriage is a sacred. Similarly, Jack Eccles, a clergyman who has companionship with Rabbit, also believes in the sanctity of marriage. When his wife Lucy asks him, "Why *were* you so anxious to get them back together?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 229). He replies, "Marriage

is a sacrament" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 229). She asks earnestly, "Even a bad marriage?" He replies, "Yes." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 229).

Harry's intermittent sense of responsibility is also evidenced in his blaming himself for Rebecca's death. Harry loves his newly born daughter Rebecca. Harry also gets a job in Springer motors. Apparently it seems that Harry is back and everything will be fine. But Harry is never gratified with what he has. He wants to get intimate with Janice but she refuses because of her postnatal condition and Harry goes away once again. Janice in a state of depression and drunkenness accidentally drowns Rebecca. He blames himself and not Janice for the accident. But after Rebecca's funeral he suddenly shifts the blame and the burden of guilt onto Janice. As a result, he runs away leaving everyone.

Harry is a truant, a vagabond who runs away not only from his family but also from his mistress. He once again goes to Ruth. Ruth is upset with him but allows him to get inside the house. He becomes glad on knowing that Ruth is pregnant and doesn't have the abortion. Ruth may be judged by people as abhorrent but her values are such that she could not kill a baby. Harry doesn't know where to stop so he runs away from here also. He is unable to save any of the relationships. His journey leads him only into boondocks.

"The Calvinists regarded marriage as a divine ordinance with high moral value. However, its essential purpose is procreation: for the rest it is a guard against sexual promiscuity" (D'Souza 236). In *Rabbit Run* and *Rabbit Redux* however, marriage is not given moral value and does not serve as a guard against promiscuity. However imperfectly it is restored in *Rabbit Redux*. It proves that the husband and the

wife are attached to their roots and to each other. Even if they are not strong morally and pursue pleasure at the cost of their family, they are reunited in the end.

In *Rabbit at Rest*, the last sequel to the Rabbit quartet, Harry Rabbit Angstrom is fifty five and has become a grandfather as now his son Nelson is married to a woman called Pru with two kids. Harry is approaching his death. Harry becomes addicted to candies and chocolates which is certainly not good for his health. Harry tells Thelma, "A couple won't kill me . . . and takes a few macadamia nuts into his fingers" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 178). Harry's masochism evidenced in the entire series is well manifested in this novel too.

He and Janice are together but he never forget how thirty years ago, his daughter Rebecca got drowned. Harry suspects that he has an illegitimate daughter with a woman called Ruth, who once calls him "Mr. Death" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 53).

After the Skeeter episode, Harry has mixed feelings for Blacks. Peggy, with whom he was on the night when his house got burned, is no more. Harry's sister Mim is in Las Vegas.

Harry's relationships are based more on reasons other than his love for his partners. Harry and Janice spends half of the year in Pennsylvania where there is a woman named Thelma, with whom Harry has an affair. Thelma says to Harry, "You never loved me, Harry. You loved the fact that I loved you" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 180). Thelma is Ronnie's wife and has two sons. Harry knows Ronnie since childhood and has an instinctive dislike for him. The affair with his wife is may be due to his vindictive dislike for Ronnie..

It is usually seen that people who sin are made to suffer but here is a woman who sins so that she can get a justification for her sufferings and an answer to the

question as to why is she made to suffer. Thelma is a religious woman, a churchgoer. Yet she suffers from a disease called lupus. "It seems to explain her lupus, if she's an adulteress. It makes it easier on Him if she deserves to be punished" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 177). Thelma tells Harry, "You make your own punishments in life, I honest to God believe that. You get exactly what you deserve. God sees to it" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 180). Thelma believes that, ". . . the affair has enriched her transactions with God, giving her something to feel sinful about, to discuss with Him" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 177). She in a way tries to find Poetic justice for her illness the other way round. It is believed that God punishes and rewards people according to their actions. This is what is called Divine justice. In this case Thelma, a firm believer, participates in Divine justice.

Some positive notes in the bleak atmosphere of the series include Harry's sense of redemption in rescuing his grandchild. Harry and Janice live in their own house and Nelson and Pru in their own. One day Harry takes his grandchild to a beach where he saves her from drowning. He feels that at least he is able to save another child if not her daughter.

In order to practice morality one needs to have a strong will. When Nelson beats Pru, she calls Harry and Janice. Another situation of moral crisis crops up in the family when it is revealed that Nelson has incurred serious debts and is in a habit of taking drugs. Thelma talks to Harry about Nelson and says, "My boys say he's a cocaine addict. They have all used it, that generation, but Nelson they tell me is really hooked. As they say, the drug runs him, instead of him just using the drugs" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 182). Janice talks to Nelson on the matter and says, "Nelson. If I gave you the twelve thousand, would you swear off drugs for good?" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 138). To which Nelson replies, "I could try but I can't honestly promise"

(Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 138). It is his lack of will. He is not strong enough to resist drugs which proves his moral weakness.

Family disintegration always affects children the most, as it is witnessed in the case of Nelson. He's a drug addict. He has not been brought up in a happy family. When Janice tries to scold him, Nelson says to Janice, "What about what you did to me, all that mess around when Becky died so I never had a sister, and then that time you ran away with your oily Greek and crazy Dad brought Jill and then Skeeter into the house and they tried to make me take dope when I was just a little kid?" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 286).

The disintegration of values affecting family roots and the next generations finally takes a toll from Harry. Harry is worried about Nelson, about his business and about his own life. Whatever is going on in his life offers him no hope of improvement. He is tense and disturbed and unlike Janice he is not strong enough to try to handle these things and gets a heart attack. He is in the hospital, Janice goes there and also Mim comes to visit him. Harry and Mim's parents are no more. Thelma and Ronnie also come to pay a visit to him. In the hospital there is a nurse Annabelle who looks after Harry and she is none other than Ruth's daughter and Harry doubts that she is also his daughter. She asks him to meet Ruth but he refuses.

Death is seen as an answer to the chaos in the life of Rabbit family. It is decided by Harry and Janice that Nelson has to be sent to a detox centre. Firstly Nelson doesn't agree but finally he does. Nelson has a business partner named Lyle who is also approaching his end. Harry meets Lyle to talk about Nelson with a hope that Lyle may suggest some way out for Nelson but Lyle himself is about to die. Lyle tells Harry about death that, "One good thing about it, is you become harder to frighten. By minor things" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 198).

Harry's life is in a state of sexual and interpersonal anarchy. He is not only promiscuous but also incestuous. As he is in the last stage of his life he knows he is approaching death and he has nothing to look forward to. He commits an act of incest in order to break the boredom. One evening Janice goes to meet Nelson in the detox centre. And this time Pru and Harry are left alone. Pru has to take care of him. Pru is found to be dropping hints to him. "Pru surprises him by kissing him on the mouth" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 10), which is definitely a mark of sexual love. The vegetable that Pru serves "... have a delicate pointed taste that Harry feels is aimed at him, a personal message the others consume without knowing" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 100). Harry reads the message according to his desire. Harry says, "What a pair of beauties, of the mother and the daughter" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 10). The physical attraction between them is hinted upon by the narrator from the beginning of the novel. The narrator says, "She likes Harry and he likes her though they have never found a way around all these others to express it" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 10). This leads to a one night stand between the father-in-law and the daughter-in-law i.e. between Harry and Pru. Pru says to Harry, "We're all trash, really. Without God to lift us up and make us into angels we're all trash" (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 312). Faith for the sinners is used more vehemently so that they feel their humanity.

Sexual contact for characters especially, Harry is a way to escape from boredom and desperation. After some time Nelson comes back rehabilitated. Pru and Harry hide their affair from Janice as well as Nelson. In order to get rid of Nelson's debts Janice decides to sell one house and accommodate both the families in one house. She discusses this idea with Harry. He keeps quiet. But when she tells this to Pru, she unveils the secret of what happened between her and Harry. Both Nelson and Janice get angry and upset. On knowing the truth Janice asks Harry, "She said you

and she slept together that night you stayed here your first night out of the hospital” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 392). Janice further says, “She said she doesn’t know it happened, except there’d always been this little attraction between you two and that night everything seemed so desperate” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 392). Janice asks Harry, “How could you? Your own daughter-in-law” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 393). Harry tells Janice, “We aren’t at all blood-related. It was just like a normal one-night stand. She was hard-up and I was at death’s door. It was her way of playing nurse” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 395). Pru is sexually promiscuous and Harry too. And for Harry this is not the first time. He had Ruth, Peggy, and Thelma. Janice says she will never ever forgive him because of the incestuous nature of the association.

Despite the instances of delinquencies on part of both the partners, the family was yet able to come together. Harry’s incestuous liaison with his daughter-in-law at a time when he is on the verge of death seems to have crossed the limits of any tolerable licentiousness for the family. So Harry leaves his family and starts living in a motel. On the drive he listens to the radio and thinks irreverently, “Hard to believe God is always listening, never gets bored” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 400). Days pass by leading to a desperate feeling of ennui. Harry reflects, “TV families and your own are hard to tell apart, except yours isn’t interrupted every six minutes by commercials and theirs don’t get bogged down into nothingness, a state where nothing happens . . . nothing at all but boredom and a lost feeling. . . .” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 426). A basketball game provides Harry with some respite from the boredom of his old age.

Death plays the role of a labeler in the novel which leaves mark of regret in the survivors. One day Harry gets a chance of playing basketball which is no less than a golden opportunity for him in this state of boredom. He has always longed for this moment. He never regains that pleasure of success that he enjoyed as a young

basketball player. After the game he feels sick and is admitted in the hospital. It can be taken as his last wish before his demise. Dr. Morris tells Janice, “He came in to me some days ago and I didn’t like what I heard in his chest” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 463). Janice as well as Nelson comes to visit him. Even Janice wants him back but it’s already too late as Harry’s death is imminent.

For Janice, forgiveness, a highly cherished Christian act becomes next to impossible even till the end. Janice realizes, “She had never meant never to forgive him, she had been intending one of these days to call, but the days slipped by; holding her silence had become a kind of addiction. How could she have hardened her heart so against this man who for better or worse had placed his life beside hers at the altar?” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 464). At heart, they hold institution of marriage sacred but their actions belie it.

As the title suggests, the time for him to rest comes. Harry dies. Novel ends at “Maybe Enough” (Updike *Rabbit At Rest* 466). Enough has more than one connotation. It may mean enough of life, enough of sinning and from writer’s and readers’ perspective, it may mean enough of writing. With it the saga of a legendary character comes to an end.

The novel showcases how family values lose their meanings in an American family. They flout incest taboo. Also the relationship of husband and wife, and father and son is affected. It is a novel about lurking danger of hidden desire taking over civilization. There is confusion among characters about who should be loved how much and this leads to crossing of boundaries. They seem to have renounced religion at least in their actions. Frustration and repressed desires shake the institution of family. The Rabbit series evokes sympathy as well as disgust for the main character.

A Month of Sundays is another work by Updike which concerns itself with disintegration of values. A novel about a man who is promiscuous, lecherous and for whom moral restrictions have no significance. The story of *A Month of Sundays* deals with the character of Tom Marshfield, a minister of the church who has put the ministry to disgrace and is in a sanatorium for treatment. Tom says to his father "They are sending me away. They say I've disgraced the ministry" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 171). He has to spend a month in the sanatorium. His opinion about his own condition is "The month is to be one of recuperation – as I think of it, "retraction," my condition being officially diagnosed as one of distraction" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 3). But for him his condition is not that bad. He says, "In my diagnosis I suffer from nothing less virulent than the human condition, and so would preach it" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 4). It is his opinion that human nature is what he is like. According to him all human beings behave in the same manner as he does. His belief is that promiscuity is in human nature and cannot be chastened.

He is a man obsessed with sex. He does not believe that for him bliss is satisfaction of spiritual needs rather than physical needs. He is promiscuous and blasphemous. He has carnal love for women. In other words he is a hedonist. He proudly explains:

Adultery, my friends, is our inherent condition: "ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery: But I say unto you, that whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery already in his heart." But who that has eyes to see cannot so lust? Was not the first Divine Commandment received by human ears, "Be fruitful and multiply?" Adultery is not a choice to be avoided; it is a

circumstance to be embraced. (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 44-45)

He interprets these commandments according to his own predilection. It is right that Christianity asks mankind to multiply in order to sustain life but not at the cost of values. "Christian ethics does not deny that in general moral conduct involves the preservation of life and its evolution to a higher stage" (D'Souza 258). But at the same time "It declares that there may be occasions when the individual, in conformity with moral demands, ought to lay down that is, sacrifice, his physical life. Christian ethics is essentially a spiritual not merely a biological theory" (D'Souza 258).

Ironically even in the sanatorium Tom Marshfield tries to woo Ms. Prynne who is there to take care of people like him. He thinks "I feel there is a place in you for me" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 215). In one of his entries he writes, "I fall toward you as a meteorite toward the earth, as a comet toward the sun" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 217). He feels that he acts freely and is not bound to follow any norm without realizing that ". . . to sin is not liberty but is slavery. Free-will is God's gift, and his evidence that he wants us to be free and like himself. But passions and lusts are chains" (D'Souza 198). Despite this realization at a mental level, he is chained by his own lustful desires in his practical life. He himself admits, "The sheets of marriage bed are interwoven with the leaden threads of eternity; the cloth of the adulterous couch with the glowing, living filaments of transience . . ." (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 47).

Through Tom Marshfield's entries and memoirs we come to know that in order to justify his acts he tries to make his wife fall in love with another man. He says, "I did seriously hope, amid the pressure warped improbabilities of my affair with Alicia, to mate Jane with Ned Bork, and thus arrange a happy ending for all but

the Pharisees" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 58). But she, being loyal and religious, does not let herself indulge in such obscene activities. This irritates him making him say "What babies they were! I thought they might at least fornicate out of conversational boredom. But they never seem to weary of talking" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 60). He is contemptuous towards their uprightness. This shows his negative opinion about moral values. Unlike him, his wife is loyal not only to her religion but also to her husband despite knowing the fact that he has flings with his female parishners. He himself admits "I did sleep with a few, by way of being helpful" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 136). The novel ends at the completion of his stay at the sanatorium and fulfillment of his hidden desire for Ms. Prynne.

The readers witness a complete erosion of values in case of Tom Marshfield. By sending him to a rehab, Updike clearly states that in his opinion a person with no moral values is mentally ill and deserves to be treated. This novel revolves around a man who is supposed to preach values to others has lost them himself. It is ironic that a person who is supposed to be the custodian of moral values mocks and flouts them himself.

Tom Marshfield fails to understand that although "... physical functions ... are a part of the significance of existence. But these functions are not isolated and are to be performed in reference to a wide and coordinated whole of the good life. ... Even the sensuous pleasures are not excluded: they are simply accorded their due subordinate place" (D'Souza 263). His physical functions are just for the sake of pleasure. He is in the pursuit of carnal gratification with his own parishners and colleagues. It is not serving any higher or lofty purpose. In the absence of any purpose in his life he becomes nymphomaniac.

The Witches of Eastwick also broaches the subject of values. It is a story of three witches with human qualities and weaknesses. Updike patterns the world of supernaturals on human world. Alexandra, Jane and Sukie the three witches fall for the same man named Darryl Van Horne and want him for themselves. "The three witches fell silent, realizing that tongue-tied, they were themselves under a spell, of a greater" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 34). They are enthralled by his personality. Sukie says, "We all wanted him." (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 242). Since Darryl's attempt to lure all three, raises a question whether the witches are evil by themselves or the human being is compelling them to become evil. Sukie tells Alexandra, "The tennis court is going to be green, even the fencing. It's almost done and he wants us all to come play while the weather isn't too bad yet" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 64). He meets Alexandra at a party and tries to be friendly with her. "Yet he had the confidence of the cultured and well-to-do, stooping low to achieve intimacy with Alexandra" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 35). Jane is also close to him. "Since Van Horne had come in her life Jane was more passionate than she had ever been about music . . ." (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 161). She wants to meet him again for which she cancels her meeting with her two friends and says to Alexandra "I can't make it. . . . It's Darryl again. He has some lovely little Webern bagatelles he wants to try on me. . . ." (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 57).

The Witches of Eastwick is a novel about the destructive power of jealousy. The witches are jealous of each other as well as the human wife Darryl has. Sukie goes to his mansion to conduct his interview. "'You went there!'" Alexandra jealously accused Sukie, over the phone, having read the article in the *Word*" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 64). They start having their secret visits to the mansion. "Now each woman had her share, her third, of Van Horne to be secretive about, their solitary

undiscussed visits to the island. . . ." (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 162). He does not marry them but finds some other girl named Jenny making them feel jealous and deprived. Jane says, "She stole him" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 242). As a result, they use their magical powers to ruin his life and ultimately his wife dies. Jane says, "You pay for every sin" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 255). However, before the death of Daryl's wife, Alexandra tries to undo the spell realizing that they have done much harm to her and should leave her now. Her realization comes too late as the spell has already done its work Alexandra discusses with Jane and Sukie "I told you, I'd just had a phone conversation with Jenny in which she'd asked me to save her. I felt guilty. I was afraid" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 284). After the death of his wife he leaves the town of Eastwick. Towards the end of the story even the witches leave Eastwick and remain just a myth for the generations to come. "The witches are gone, vanished; we were just an interval in their lives, and they in ours" (Updike *The Witches of Eastwick* 307).

Almost all the characters in the novels discussed till now are not pious. Sometimes the character is a pervert like Tom Marshfield and sometimes there is someone like Harry who is not as bad as Tom Marshfield, but commits mistakes that lead to disintegration of values. None of them stops himself before doing wrong or regrets after doing it but here is a character Ahmad in the novel *Terrorist* who unlike others is a believer in piety and conforms to his religion. He is the one who stops himself before it's too late.

Terrorist is another example of a family where values are not held important. Ahmad's character is in contrast to his mother. In the absence of her husband she has no steady partner. Ahmad shares a good rapport with his boss Charlie and often they have discussions. Charlie asks him about his girlfriend and relationships and offers

him that he can get him a girl. To which Ahmad replies, "That's a kind of wish on your part, but without marriage it would go against my beliefs" (Updike *Terrorist* 182). Charlie says that the girl wouldn't be a good Muslim girl but some infidel. He replies "I do not desire uncleanness" (Updike *Terrorist* 182). But one night Joryleen, the girl whom Ahmad loves, comes to him and asks him to do anything with her as she has been paid money by Charlie. Joryleen says, "Let's get some clothes off and pick up one of these beds" (Updike *Terrorist* 216). He says to her, "Joryleen, you keep those clothes on. I respect you the way you used to be, and anyway don't want to be devirginated, until a lawful marriage to a good Muslim woman, like the Quran says" (Updike *Terrorist* 216). Ahmad is pious. For him, values are the most important. He conforms to his religion.

Later Ahmad is brainwashed. He is on the verge of becoming a terrorist but his rationality and good will saves him from becoming a terrorist.

Updike's way of weaving the plot is remarkable as always. The novel proves that if values are given their due place no temptation or excitation can disturb order in one's life. This is Updike's way of telling that it's never too late to make a new beginning.

If we analyze we'll find that actually there is no sin in being tempted but in committing an act which gives evil results. That is why the committed sins are more heavily punished than the intended but uncommitted ones. Like Tom Marshfield and Rabbit, Ahmad is also tempted to commit wrong. Humans can be attracted towards something bad also but their will power should be strong enough to stop them. Tom Marshfield not only gets tempted but commits the sin and instead of rectifying his weaknesses, he tries to justify it. Evil suggestions can be resisted if the person wills to as in case of Ahmad who, in spite of being brainwashed, realizes his mistake and

stops himself from committing a grave crime of murdering innocent people. Lust or adultery is often referred to as the cause of all the other sins, as is evident in case of Tom Marshfield as well as Harry who commits incest.

Since Updike deals with the subject of carnal temptations in his novels, he has coined the aphorism, "Rape is the sexual sin of the mob, adultery of the bourgeoisie and incest of the aristocracy" (Updike "Van Loves Ada, Ada Loves Van" 72). Updike's major subject is adultery and he even talks of incest but he prefers not to take the issue of rape in his works.

The novels taken up in this chapter have one thing in common and that is erosion of values in the American society and its aftermaths. Updike has made his novels a medium to emphasize the importance of values. Values have become a casualty in this fast pace of modern world. It is said that literature is the mirror of life. Updike's novels mirror the society and try to delve deep in the minds of the characters to come up with a diagnosis of the problems. Updike does not impose anything on the readers. He only shows the repercussions of two sides and leaves it unto the readers to decide which one to choose.

While dealing with values and their disintegration in American society, what can be concluded is that values or morality or the Christian moral ideal cannot be expressed in absolute terms, but are embraced in harmony with the whole wealth of moral values.

The theme of pursuit of pleasure is found in most cases of immorality and is a common theme in the novels discussed in this chapter. It is a pursuit that causes erosion of values. Ironically ethics aim at attainment of pleasure only as discussed by D'Souza:

The conception of ethics that has made an immediate appeal to many is Hedonism – That the aim of moral conduct is the attainment of the greatest possible pleasure with the greatest possible avoidance of pain. The moral criterion is ultimately the relative preponderance of pleasure over pain. The theory known as Psychological – hedonism-that one can act *only* with the motive of attaining pleasure or avoiding pain – involves the question whether in such case any genuine morality exists. For if one *can* do only just this, there is little if indeed any meaning in saying that one *ought* to do this or that. . . . A person acting immorally, as well as morally, may be said to be aiming at pleasure or the avoidance of pain. . . . The assumption, generally implied in Hedonism, that only pleasure or the avoidance of pain is desirable cannot be said to be justified. Another difficulty urged against Hedonism is that though it implies that the individual is to aim at his own greatest predominance of pleasure over pain, morality as understood in history has been regarded as involving also the direct or indirect consideration of others. (256)

Absolute pursuit of pleasure is found in case of Tom as well as Harry. Their acts do not affect them as such but certainly hurt others and causes pain for others. They do not even once admit that they are at fault.

It is claimed that the human mind finds itself to be absolutely compelled to do certain things . . . purely and simply for the sake of doing them, and to refrain from doing other things . . . purely and simply for the sake of leaving them undone. Insofar as such a

compulsion . . . is supposed to manifest itself necessarily in human beings just as surely as they are human beings, this constitutes what is called *the moral or ethical* nature of human beings as such. (Fichte 19)

So it can be said that what Tom Marshfield and Harry Angstrom do reveal their ethical and moral nature.

For some philosophers morality implies what one ought to do for the good of others, for some being moral implies to act according to free will and not by force or compulsion. Morality can be summarized as doing right by one's choice and not out of pressure. One is to expect that happiness will eventually be associated with virtue and misery with vice. And it is not only about expecting but it is also about believing that it does happen and acting upon it for inner happiness.

One more thing required for preserving the values is patience as is witnessed partially in case of Harry who never complains neither against his own wife, nor against Skeeter whom he dislike. The evidence of true patience is the refusal to render evil for evil. Harry never renders evil for evil as in case of Skeeter. But his indifference towards the transgressors is may be due to the fact that he is the worst kind himself. He is no different from people who pursue pleasure. He commits adultery and practices incest also.

Even Ethics [*Sittenlehre*] is not a *doctrine of wisdom* [*Weisheitslehre*] – indeed, such a doctrine is impossible as such, inasmuch as wisdom should be considered more of an art than a science; instead, like all philosophy, ethics is *Wissenschaftslehre*. More specifically, ethics is the *theory of our consciousness of*

our moral nature in general and of our specific duties in particular. (Fichte 21)

Disintegration of values is evidenced in the novels discussed here. Characters seem to be impulsive and indifferent to piety, humility and religious devotion as is seen in the characters of Tom Marshfield, Harry Rabbit Angstrom and even in Darryl Van Horne. But unlike them, Ahmad possesses the virtues of devotion, piety and humility. On one hand these characters resignedly do whatever they want to do in a perverse manner. Whereas Ahmad checks his behavior before he could act upon his evil impulses.

All the characters are different from each other. Harry, a common man, Darryl, a wealthy man, Tom, a priest and Ahmad, a teenager all get tempted towards wrong. So is it their impulsive and indifferent nature responsible for the disintegration of values or is it the pursuit of pleasure or the urge to do something forbidden? Whatever it may be but there is clear disintegration of values especially in case of Tom and Harry. What makes Harry of *Rabbit Redux* different from Tom Marshfield is that Harry carries out his responsibilities of bringing up Nelson in the absence of Janice and reconciles with his wife when she comes back and does not forsake his family. On the other hand Tom is an incorrigible pervert especially if judged against his vocation in mind. Updike has vividly depicted the disintegration of values in his novels since accuracy is his strength of his art of writing.

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Chapter 2

Faith Lost

FAITH LOST

Faith is the major theme of many of Updike's novels. Faith is trust, belief, reliance, sincerity and loyalty. This trust, belief, reliance, sincerity and loyalty can be towards religious doctrines and even towards a person. Faith has a wide connotation and is used in various contexts. The word 'faith' most commonly and primarily is associated with religion. "In religious traditions stressing divine grace, it is the inner certainty or attitude of love granted by God himself. In Christian theology, faith is the divinely inspired human response to God's historical revelation through Jesus Christ and, consequently, is of crucial significance" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Faith is a basic tenet of every religion. The question and necessity of faith arises from a common need of common humanity for the concept of a being who is beyond all human limitations and weaknesses. Faith is something which everyone needs in their lives. In other words, faith is quintessential for life. Faith acts as a support for human beings.

Faith is attitude, conviction and conduct based on a relationship with God. It is not static, but grows in strength and depth as humans nourish and foster their relationship with God in our life. Despite human need for faith of various kinds namely in divinity, in interpersonal relationships, in humanity and even in themselves faith always rests on foundations that are more often than not far from being firm and unshakeable. Dependent on transcendental experience as well as on empirical evidences, faith often eludes human mind. Most importantly with the advancement of science and technology, with human assertion of will to power resulting in World Wars, the establishment of a global economy resting upon a market of consumerism and materialism, the signs of late capitalism, faith as a matter of fact is in a state of crisis that was never seen before. It can be argued that faith exists as a powerful tool that still motivates people's action. However faith a positive energy, which brings about peace in the inner and outer worlds of humanity is definitely in short supply.

Updike's thematic concern often hinges upon the question of religious and interpersonal faith. His novels explore the inner psychology of his characters who suffer from one or the other kind of crisis of faith, often finding themselves bereaved of or incapacitated to found their lives on a robust kind of faith. The lost faith, at the

same time, does not quietly disappear, it rather makes its presence felt conspicuously by a vacuum it creates by its absence or elusive presence. Hence, the title of the chapter "Faith Lost."

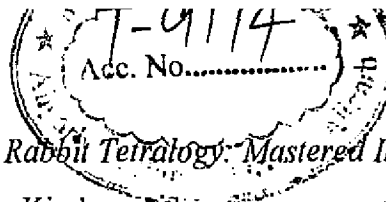
"THE AMERICAN LITERARY SCENE (sic) includes a number of novelists and short-story writers who, while remaining firm in the Catholic faith, are yet sensitive to religious doubts and questionings that re-currently assail thoughtful persons of any faith and of no faith" (Yates 469). It is to say that not only agnostics have doubts and questions but even people with strong faith can have the urge to ask questions regarding faith, if they don't ask such questions taking it as blasphemy, still at times they have certain questions in their mind.

As far as Updike is concerned he himself suffered crisis of faith. "Updike was reared a Lutheran, but of what synod he does not recall. His inability to remember this detail does not prove anything, but that inability and his joining the Congregational church in Ipswich, Massachusetts, for reasons of geography and of "family harmony" suggest that he is no sectarian. However, neither is he a secularist" (Yates 470).

As stated earlier, his moral and theological vision which is clearly depicted in his writing is inspired by Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. "The intricate warp and woof of his literary style can, in short, be said to be the rubble of footnotes bound into Kierkegaard" (Crowley 359).

Kierkegaard says, "The infinite resignation is the last stage prior to faith, so that one who has not made this movement has not faith; for only in infinite resignation do I become clear to myself with respect to my eternal validity, and only then there can be only question of grasping existence by virtue of faith" (Kierkegaard 65-66). "Faith therefore is not an aesthetic emotion but something far higher, precisely because it has resignation as its presupposition; it is not an immediate instinct of heart, but is the paradox of life and existence" (Kierkegaard 67).

The importance of the text *Fear and Trembling* can be estimated from the statement that, "Updike lists *Fear and Trembling* as the single text that most altered him, both as a person and as a writer"



(Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 7). His encounter with Kierkegaard came as a watershed. "After *Fear and Trembling*, I had a secret twist inside, a precarious tender core of cosmic defiance; for a time, I thought of all my fiction as illustrations of Kierkegaard" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 7).

Like Kierkegaard Updike also takes up the unresolved issues. Updike texts do not impose anything. "I think of my books not as sermons or directives in a war of ideas but as objects, with different shapes and textures and the mysteriousness of anything that exists" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 233). His emphasis is on unresolved aspect of the situation in which the protagonist is caught up. For instance in *Rabbit Run* it would be disappointing if one would expect a proper ending in which all issues are resolved by the end and characters live together happily. He is of the view that complexities of the life or the tensions in life continue till the end of life.

. . . he has repeatedly expressed his Kierkegaardian faith in the essentially unresolved and dialectical quality of human existence: "Un-fallen Adam is an ape. . . . I find that to be a person is to be in a situation of tension, to be in a dialectical situation. A truly adjusted person is not a person at all—just an animal with clothes on or a statistic." The unresolved quality of this dialectic constitutes for Updike its human quality, for a human being free of tension ceases somehow to be human." (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 7)

The spiritual journey that the protagonists take up in their lives leads to the self-evaluation of the characters. When Rabbit abandons his home and takes up a role of a wanderer, he undergoes a process of self-evaluation due to which he is able to understand his sin and predicts either Janice or Rebecca would die. "Updike has remarked that he conceives all his books as moral debates with the reader. . . . Forced into resolving those paradoxes and ambiguities for themselves, Updike's readers are indirectly cast into a mode of self-evaluation in the first person" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 8). The characters may lose faith

but they definitely learn something from their experience. The emphasis is on self-evaluation, on experience rather than on resolving tensions. "A realistic novelist rather than a religious thinker, Updike eschews edification in favor of empirical precision and thematic ambiguity. . . . Whereas in Kierkegaard movement of the dialectic is always progressive, inching the reader closer and closer to religious inwardness, in Updike the corresponding movement is always back and forth" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 10). In Kierkegaard the readers look within themselves to find faith but in Updike novels it is not only the inwardness that is taken into account. Updike avoids commenting on moral improvement of the characters rather he pays attention to their experience as is seen in *Rabbit Run* and *A Month of Sundays*. Rabbit and Marshfield are not shown as completely transformed or fully satisfied with what they have gained till the end.

As already discussed in Introduction, after Kierkegaard it is Barth who is a major influence on Updike. "Updike's borrowings from Barth are largely confined to those ideas and concepts associated with Barth's middle phase, the period of his dialectical theology" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 16). ". . . Updike and Barth also argue for what Barth resoundingly calls a "Wholly Other" God. For Barth, God is and must remain *totaliter aliter*, or Wholly Other. . . ." (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 13).

Updike is not a theologian. He is an artist, specifically a novelist, whose first responsibility is an aesthetic one. Kierkegaard and Barth provided Updike with ideas, with ways of seeing the world and with methods of artistic expression—but that is all. Not only has Updike freely adapted these ideas to his own use, but he has also freely indulged in his artistic prerogative to do so. (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 24)

Definitely Updike is not set out to preach through his novels. He is concerned with the thematic quality and beauty of the novels. He may be inspired by theologians such as Kierkegaard and Barth but he is not promoting or emphasizing their ideas as it is. Their works have just provided him with the ideas or helped him in shaping his own ideas or plots.

Updike's stress has been in dialectical approach to the Divine question of Divine existence flawlessly and unquestioningly. The novels taken into account discuss the loss of faith. It is not easy to believe and what is more difficult is to keep one's faith intact. The problem of Clarence in the novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies* clearly depicts this difficulty. The difficulty of taking moral decisions is depicted in *Rabbit Run* in which Harry knows that he should not leave Janice and Ruth at the end without informing them. But it is not easy for him to stay with either of them. He is unable to take the morally correct decision. Thus, Updike's novels "... deal with the problem of faith and the difficulty of moral decisions; and ... dramatize a moral dilemma through the complexities of sexual love" (Schopen 531).

The world of Updike's novels has human, moral and spiritual aspects. "Humanly, morally, this world is ambiguous and static; but spiritually it is a world which witnesses the dramatic confrontation of life with death, of faith with the void" (Schopen 534). Ambiguity is found everywhere in his novels. When characters' faith confronts doubts, they lose their faith, be it Rabbit or Tom or Clarence or Sarah.

"Bereft of moral certitude, and realizing that any act is likely to be "crass and murderous" from some essentially legitimate perspective, Updike's protagonists simply refuse to act at all" (Schopen 532-533). The crass act of running in *Rabbit Run* turns out to be murderous for baby Rebecca. Rabbit becomes responsible because of his in action whereas and when he does nothing for Ruth, he becomes responsible by his lack of action, as a result of which he is bereaved of his daughter for whole of his life.

"If Updike's protagonists are morally "paralysed," they are so in part because of their sensitivity to "the oppressive quality of cosmic blackness": obsessed by death, exhausted by their effort to believe, and convinced of the impossibility of sorting through the ramifications of each moral decision, they can merely wait, and hope, and suffer the guilt. . . ." (Schopen 533-534). The characters are convinced that they cannot change anything, that there is nothing that is in their hands so they refuse to take any course of action because they are sure it will be futile. They just sit back and wait for things to happen by themselves. They assume a passive role. Rabbit is not shown to be taking up any course of action after he leaves Ruth and runs away because he feels that his active role has taken a lot from him. Sarah leaves her

husband thinking her absence will change him and he will want her back nevertheless it does not affect Charles at all. Rabbit in *Rabbit Run*, like many other characters who suffer the guilt and are unable to carry the burden of guilt anymore, shifts the guilt onto his wife. Their exhaustion, seen by Schopen as a result of their “effort to believe” is the major cause of their loss of faith. Their exhaustion is exacerbated by their constant realization of and sensitivity to “cosmic blackness,” the metaphysical uncertainty and nightmare. The protagonist Clarence tries to believe but is unsuccessful in his effort. Rabbit thinks that God would have saved his daughter but God does not intervene and this cosmic blackness makes them exhausted.

Rabbit Run depicts the need as well as the difficulty of faith. Harry is a former high-school basketball star. “. . . in his time Rabbit was famous through the county; in basketball in his junior year he set a B league scoring record that in his senior year he broke with a record that was not broken until four years later, that is, four years ago” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 7). Rabbit admits, “I played first-rate basketball. I really did. And after you are first-rate at something, no matter what, it kind of takes the kick out of being second-rate” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 92). After being a star player or being at number one position, it is not at all easy for Rabbit to come to terms with a middle class life in which he does not receive any star treatment from anyone. What he has now is just an ordinary job which he thinks he does not deserve at all. He just can’t accept this second rate job after being a star player once. This demotion in life is the major cause of Rabbit’s loss of faith. Rabbit was an ideal player. Rabbit says slowly. “I never fouled” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 56). Tothero says, “That’s right, you never fouled. He never did. Harry was always the idealist” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 56). Rabbit shrugs. “I didn’t have to” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 56).

As an idealist, Rabbit wants to keep his life in order after he gets married. He has a two year old son and works as a salesman of kitchen gadgets. His alcoholic and pregnant wife does nothing except watching television. When he tries to give up smoking, his wife Janice sardonically responds, “You don’t drink, now you don’t smoke. What are you doing, becoming a saint?” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 10). But “Alcohol and cards Rabbit both associates with a depressing kind of sin, sin with breath” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 16). But his wife mocks at his positive efforts to keep his life in order.

Rabbit wants to get out of the vacuity of his middle class life. “It just felt like the whole business was fetching and hauling, all the time trying to hold this mess together she was making all the time. I don’t know, it seemed like I was glued in with a lot of busted toys and empty glasses and the television going and meals late or never and no way of getting out. Then all of a sudden it hit me how easy it was to get out, just walk out, and by damn it *was* easy” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 91).

The clutter behind him in the room—the Old-fashioned glass with its corrupt dregs, the chock-full ashtray balanced on the easy-chair arm, the rumpled rug, the floppy stacks of slippery newspapers, the kid’s toys here and there broken and stuck and jammed, a leg off a doll and a piece of bent cardboard that went with some breakfast-box cutout, the rolls of fuzz under the radiators, the continual crisscrossing mess—clings to his back like a tightening net. (Updike *Rabbit Run* 14)

Rabbit’s life has the monotony that often afflicts married people. The lack of interest on part of the partners to make the situation brighter and more cheerful out of the ordinary existence makes married life oppressive, burdensome and incarcerating. It becomes a bane for marital life. Both Harry and Janice have some strange kind of reaction when it comes to God. For instance, one day Harry and Janice watch a TV program and the person in the show says,

Know Thyself. . . . It means, be what you arebe yourself. God doesn’t want a tree to be a waterfall, or a flower to be a stone. God gives to each one of us a special talent. Janice and Rabbit become unnaturally still; both are Christians. God’s name makes them feel guilty. God wants some of us to become scientists, some of us to become artists, some of us to become firemen and doctors and trapeze artists. And He gives to each of us the special talents to become these things, *provided we work to develop them*. . . . Learn to understand your talents, and then work to develop them. That’s the way to be happy. (Updike *Rabbit Run* 10)

The talent which Rabbit has is that of playing basketball but now at this stage of life it seems to be of no use so for him. The talent which he has cannot help him anymore. He feels exhausted. He is convinced that things cannot be sorted out. What he can do, is either wait for things to happen by themselves or escape from the reality. His running is thus an escape from reality.

The cause of Harry's malaise is the yearning for freedom. He has existential approach. He feels he is an individual above all and he should do what he wants. He should be true to his own self. The other labels defining him as that of a husband, a father etc. are secondary, because these are the labels which are used to define him in relation to others. He seems to believe in the proposition that existence precedes essence which means that most important fact for an individual should be that he is an individual. Mrs. Smith, an elderly character from *Rabbit, Run*, remarks, "That's what you have, Harry: life. It's a strange gift and I don't know how we're supposed to use it but I know it's the only gift we got and it's a good one" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 192). Harry faces the difficulty of choosing between the call of the heart and the call of the world. Rabbit's coach Tothero says, "Do what the heart commands. The heart is our only guide" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 47). Harry decides to act in a way that his heart desires. He can be compared to Sisyphus, who does the meaningless task of pushing the rock again and again but for him he was living his life to the fullest. This was his way of attaining freedom. Harry in his own way pursues freedom but ultimately it results in meaninglessness. Nothing fruitful comes out but he does what as an individual he feels he should do.

He finds himself confined in a job he can neither adhere to nor banish, at least not without disentangling the bewildering social honeycomb into which he has been trapped. He feels nostalgic and bored. There is a feeling of ennui in him. He feels there is some kind of lacuna in his life. He feels he is at a dead end. He has nothing to feel proud of, nothing glorious, and nothing to look forward to. Harry has a quest for something big, something new. "His real happiness is a ladder from whose top rung he keeps trying to jump still higher, because he knows he should" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 174). Harry wants freedom. He feels suffocated by the nagging claims of routine life. "In his preoccupation with his feeling and his turning away from the painful aspects of life, Rabbit is blind to the omnipresence of divine grace which he seeks so

constantly" (Martin 105). Bailey compares Rabbit's faith with that of Updike's faith and argues, "Rabbit's faith is more ephemeral and less eloquent than Updike's, making him more vulnerable to nihilism than Updike, whose descent into despair often seems provided with a safety net by his ability to articulate the fall" (Bailey 40-41).

Some apparent causes of his anxiety are present there but in reality anxiety has no explicit harbinger thus the radix of Harry's anxiety lies nowhere. Harry feels he deserves something better. Harry has a passion to find his place in the world, but the way he chooses to act on this passion is largely devoid of responsibility to the people around him. He says, "There is a quality, in things, of the right way seeming wrong at first" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 32). And thus despite the realization that he may be wrong he moves in with Ruth, and have an xtra-marital relation with her. Before meeting Ruth he meets Tothero and says about his own home that, "It was no good. I've run out. I really have. . . . It was a mess as it was. . . . My wife's an alcoholic" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 38). "I mean I'm not that interested in her. I was, but I'm not" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 39). He spends a night at some place given by Tothero. "Waking up had in a way returned him to the world he deserted. He had missed Janice's crowding presence, the kid and his shrill needs, his own walls. He had wondered what he was doing. But now these reflexes, shallowly scratched, are spent, and deeper instincts flood forward, telling him he is right. He feels freedom like oxygen everywhere around him. . . ." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 45).

Rabbit's fickle mindedness leads to his loss of faith. Rabbit starts living at Ruth's place and tells her about Janice. "I'll tell you about Janice. I never thought of leaving her until the minute I did; all of a sudden it seemed obvious" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 61). Harry tries to justify his irresponsible act. "There's something about her," he insists. "She's a menace" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 83). Once again he tries to show that the fault lies with Janice. Ruth says, "This poor wife you left? You're the menace, I'd say" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 83). But Ruth does not get convinced by his argument to which he replies, "All I know is what feels right. You feel right to me sometimes. Sometimes Janice used to. Sometimes nothing does" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 262). He is hinting upon the philosophy of existentialism that as an individual he is right in doing whatever he feels like. Ruth wonders why does everybody likes him so much. She says, "Oh all the *world* loves you," then adds, "What I wonder is why? . . . I mean

why the hell *you*. What's so special about you?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 124). Rabbit says, "I'm lovable" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 124). This also reveals his narcissism. "I'm a saint," Rabbit proclaims. "I give people faith" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 124). He believes that he is giving people faith. Ruth asks him, "All I heard was you telling how great you were" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 65). Rabbit admits, "I was great. It's the fact. I mean, I'm not much good for anything now, but I really was good at that" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 65). He admits that he deserves to be liked by people. Ruth in a way tries to show him that he cannot be always right and that he is at fault. "The thing about Ruth is lately she's been trying to make him feel guilty about something." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 150). "Don't you ever think you're going to have to pay a price?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 125). "You just grab what comes don't you?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 95). "His day has been bothered by God: Ruth mocking, Eccles blinking - why did they teach you such things when if no one believed them?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 98). Neither Ruth nor Harry gets convinced at the end of the discussion but he just gets totally frustrated and reaches total despair.

Harry's sensitivity transforms into his sense of guilt. Harry comes back to his wife at the time of birth of his second child. "He is certain that as a consequence of his sin Janice or the baby will die. His sin a conglomerate of flight, cruelty, obscenity, and conceit; a black clot embodied in the entrails of the birth" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 169). It is ironic that for each sin of his, he finds a concrete vision in the form of his coming child. "His life seems a sequence of grotesque poses assumed to no purpose, a magic dance empty of belief. *There is no God; Janice can die*: the two thoughts come at once, in one slow wave" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 170). The sense of guilt overwhelms Harry so much so that his faith in God is shaken. The kind of despair he finds himself in cannot reside in the heart of a believer.

Harry's sense of guilt is reflected in the way he lacks confidence to see his own daughter. Instead of going to meet his daughter rightfully, he asks for permission. He asks permission from Doctor Crowe to see her. "Crowe seems in his mild way puzzled that Harry asks for permission. He must know the facts, yet seems unaware of the gap of guilt between Harry and humanity" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 173). When Harry meets Janice he says, "All you did was watch television and drink all the time. I mean I'm not saying I wasn't wrong, but it felt like I had to" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 185).

Harry “. . . just admits everything he was a crumb, a dope, he behaved terribly, he’s lucky not to be in jail” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 194).

Eccles, who is instrumental in uniting Harry and Janice, knows both of them very well and is fully aware of their circumstances and he senses that the problem with Harry and Janice is the absence of religious faith that can strengthen their faith in marriage. He is of the view that their visits to Church may revive their faith and be a good influence on them. He says, “. . . he hopes to see them in church” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 201). “Their debt to him is such that they agree it would be nice of them, at least one of them, to go. The one must be Harry” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 201).

Harry’s faith breathes its last when his daughter dies. Instead of explaining it in terms of failure of his parental responsibility, he blames God for His inability to directly intervene in human catastrophes. His reconciliation with his wife is short term and Harry goes away once again when Janice does not allow him to come closer. As a result, Janice gets drunk and accidentally drowns the baby in the bathtub – “an ironic baptism and fruitless sacrifice” (Yates 472). Harry gets disappointed by the fact that God does nothing at all to save his little innocent daughter. “He thinks how easy it was, yet in all His strength God did nothing. Just that little rubber stopper to lift” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 237). “God, rather, is the creator who made the world from nothing and yet who must remain entirely separate from that creation. The world follows its own course, and God does not intervene. Updike has taken great solace in this dogmatic theology. What’s more, it serves as the bedrock for Rabbit’s own theological vision” (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 18).

. . . in Updike’s universe . . . a Wholly Other God is a mixed blessing, for although such a god guarantees our freedom, it also leaves us at the mercy of the fallen world. The only way for Updike to honor the complexity and seeming randomness of reality while at the same time holding to his faith in a Wholly Other God is to hold God both culpable *and* absolved. God becomes responsible by his inaction, for only in this way can that God be allowed freely to exist. The angel of light and life, Updike’s God is

also, dialectically, the angel of death. (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 24)

God's non-intervention or the concept of "Wholly Other God" leads to Rabbit's daughter Rebecca's death. It is not that God does something due to which Rebecca dies. Instead He does nothing at all which causes Rebecca's death.

The question arises who is to be blamed? Janice, Harry or God? Is alcohol responsible for the mishap? Or no one is to be blamed. It is not clear and depends upon one's perception to interpret the situation. Harry does feel guilty. "The house again fills with the unspoken thought that he is a murderer. He accepts the thought gratefully; it's true, he is, he is, and hate suits him better than forgiveness. Immersed in hate he doesn't have to do anything; he can be paralyzed, and the rigidity of hatred makes a kind of shelter for him" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 245).

To alleviate his sense of guilt Rabbit seeks forgiveness. He accepts his mistake and wants to earn forgiveness. He asks Eccles what should he do and Eccles replies, "Be a good husband. A good father. Love what you have left" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 241). Eccles adds, "You mean to earn forgiveness? I'm sure it is, carried out through a lifetime" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 241). Eccles tries to explain Harry that forgiveness isn't achieved instantly but requires penance and that certainly takes time. He further explains that he, as a human being just like Harry, is no one to forgive him because as a human, he has also done a lot of mistakes. So he says, "Harry, it's not for me to forgive you. You've done nothing to me to forgive. I'm equal with you in guilt. We must work for forgiveness; we must earn the right to see that thing behind everything" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 241). Mr. Springer and Tothero console him. His father-in-law Mr. Springer says to him, "Life must go on. We must go ahead with what we have left" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 235). Coach Tothero says, "Right and wrong aren't dropped from the sky. We make them. Against misery" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 240). Coach Tothero here implies what Harry said earlier that he does what he feels right. Tothero also questions who decides what is right and what is wrong. We decide it so in Harry's case Harry decided and acted accordingly. Tothero says, "You're still a fine man, Harry. You have a healthy body. When I'm dead and gone, remember how your old coach told you to avoid suffering" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 240). Mr. Springer and Tothero have a positive approach and suggest that instead of looking for the past

mistakes, one should look forward and concentrate on what one has to do now. And Tothero in a way suggests that from now Harry must think before he acts so that he and others may not have to suffer because of his impulsive decisions. Unable to carry responsibility of his action, Harry now “. . . wants to believe in the sky as the source of all dictates” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 241). Harry is in a disturbed psychological state. He doesn't know whom to blame. He wants that people should not hold him responsible in any way. The blame ultimately falls on Divine failure to save them from this situation.

Harry keeps shifting blame from God to himself and then to his wife Janice. On the funeral of the baby suddenly he starts feeling that Janice is responsible for the accident. “The sky greets him. A strange strength sinks down into him. It is as if he has been crawling in a cave and now at last beyond the dark recession of crowding rocks he has seen a patch of light; he turns, and Janice's face, dumb with grief, blocks the light. . . . Don't look at me,” he says, “I didn't kill her” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 253). “I wasn't anywhere near. She's the one. . . . Hey it's O.K.,” he tells her. “You didn't mean to” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 253). “His embarrassment is savage. Forgiveness had been big in his heart and now its hate. He hates his wife's face” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 253).

Harry does blame himself for the accident and has more guilt than the “fair share of guilt” but after sometime he shifts the blame and the guilt to others which looks like an oxymoron. He not only tries to shift the guilt to human beings like Janice but he even involves deity in his guilt. Harry has an overwhelming sense of guilt. However it is mixed with pride as Rovit points out in this paragraph:

Updike's characters have more than their fair share of guilt, of course, but in what only appears to be an oxymoron, theirs is often a proud guilt—a self-reflecting feeling of unworthiness which excludes other human beings from empathy or redress. It is as though their moral contracts have been negotiated directly between themselves and a Protestant deity in such a way as to absolve them from the normal consequences of their reckless and feckless behavior. They don't necessarily set out hurt, lie to, or otherwise disappoint the expectations of their wives or children or friends,

but they don't actually lose much in the way of spiritual points when they do so transgress. (Rovit 680-681)

Harry says that Janice is responsible for baby's death. He will not carry his guilt any longer is revealed in the conversation between Eccles' wife Lucy and Harry in which she asks, "How did you sleep?" To which Harry replies, "Like death. Not a dream or anything." Lucy says, "It's the effect of a clear conscience" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 178).

"A suffocating sense of injustice blinds him. He turns and runs" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 253). "He feels Eccles chasing him but does not turn to look" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 253). "He turns to see if he has left the people behind. No one is following. Far off. . . ." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 254). "He hurries on, scrambling wildly, expecting the road to appear with every step. . . ." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 255). "Janice and Eccles and his mother and his sins seem a thousand miles behind" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 256). Harry despite his sense of guilt, does not want to feel the burden forever. His sense of guilt is so burdensome that he would like to run away from it.

Rabbi is an escapist, Escapism is futile for a creature who is chased by the repercussions of his actions, Rabbit goes to Ruth. Ruth tells him that she is pregnant. Harry is glad to know that she doesn't undergo abortion as in his heart he prays, "*God, dear God, no, not another, you have one, let this one go*" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 261). Ruth tells him, "You're Mr. Death himself. You're not just nothing, you're worse than nothing. You're not a rat, you don't stink, you're not enough to stink. . . . You don't do anything. You just wander around with the kiss of death" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 260). "Your jobs are a joke. You aren't worth hiring. Maybe once you could play basketball but you can't do anything now" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 261). Harry's attempt to escape does not yield any desired result. He faces further indictment from Ruth which incarcerates him in his sense of guilt and his memories of his sins. He says to Ruth he will come back to her and goes out to buy some groceries. There he starts thinking.

Janice, money, Eccles' phone call, the look on his mother's face all clatter together in sharp dark waves; guilt and responsibility slide together like two substantial shadows inside his chest. The mere

engineering of it—the conversations, the phone calls, the lawyers, the finances — seem to complicate, physically, in front of his mouth. . . . (Updike *Rabbit Run* 263)

Despotically Harry makes decisions and acts upon them which turn his life into a mess. As a result he again runs. He wants to get very far away, a place where no one can catch him. The fact is that the trap of guilty conscience which he wants to escape from is present everywhere. He doesn't know where to go, what to do, all he knows is to run. It is a desperate and a futile act, but it is at least a continuation of the fight for life. He wants to escape from the reality, from the world.

Harry seems to have capacity to love. However that too is not enough to release and redeem him. It rather complicates his life further. Harry loves Ruth but at the same time does not want to divorce Janice. He loves Nelson. He loves Rebecca so much so that he does not forget her even after becoming a grandfather and longs for a daughter throughout his life. He wants that Ruth should give birth to his baby but does not stay with her. He realizes, “. . . those things he was trying to balance have no weight” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 264). “The only way to get somewhere, you know, is to figure out where you're going before you go there” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 26) but Harry doesn't know which path to take. What he knows is to run. When Harry searches for a road amongst the forest he is in a way searching for a path in his life that will take him away from the wilderness of his actions.

Harry's search for freedom is symbolic of the struggle of the individual's search for meaning in a world full of materialism and meaninglessness. Rabbit struggles to come to terms with his loss of his star status, a troubled marriage, adultery and children. He is in a state of spiritual unrest. The novel depicts love's misconception and failure as a vehicle to transcendence. There is a spiritual quest and yearning prompted by dissatisfaction with the status quo.

The novel also touches upon some taboo topics such as cohabitation, prostitution, adultery, alcoholism and accidental infanticide. Harry's life seems to question to what degree can individual be free to pursue individual passions without harming others. Harry admits, “If you have the guts to be yourself, other people'll pay your price” (Updike *Rabbit Run* 129). Harry also says, “Everybody who tells you how

to act has whiskey on their breath" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 26). On seeing his indifferent and insensitive attitude towards goodness, Jack Eccles tells Harry that, "The truth is you're monstrously selfish. You're a coward. You don't care about right or wrong; you worship nothing except your own worst instincts" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 115). The minister Eccles tries to tell Harry that he is selfish because he follows his passion without considering the consequences. The direction which Harry takes makes him a terrible father, an inadequate husband, an unreliable lover, and a failing businessman. Ruth echoes this thought when she says, "He just lived in his skin and didn't give a thought to the consequences about anything" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 128). Nevertheless, Harry is an appealing character of vitality and charm.

The role played by both the ministers is of great significance. Episcopal minister Eccles tries to bring Harry and Janice together. On the other hand, Lutheran minister Mr. Kruppenbach, points out that Eccles is less interested in preaching Christ, which is his prime duty and more interested in others' family matters. In other words, he is more interested in worldly affairs and restoring faith in interpersonal relationships. The attitudes of both the clergymen are in contrast. Eccles is a humanitarian. He is benevolent. But this is not to say that Kruppenbach deserves hatred. Kruppenbach on the other hand has the *laissez faire* approach. He believes that the task of a minister is to serve God and to interfere in others personal matters. Eccles acts as a friend, philosopher, guide to Harry and this attitude of Eccles is not appreciated by Kruppenbach. Kruppenbach feels that ministers are meant for higher purposes and not for these issues which can very well be handled by professionals like lawyers etc.

Updike keeps Rabbit's character lovable. It is shown that even after knowing what Harry does, Eccles somehow likes him. Eccles meets Harry and gradually they become companions. They often play golf together. He says to Harry's mother, "When I'm with him—it's rather unfortunate, really—I feel so cheerful I quite forget what the point of my seeing him is" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 141). This statement is about human relationship with each other and also with God. Eccles admits that in the company of Harry he forgets his intention. They share a good rapport. On the other hand, human relationship with God is not as good and healthy as their interpersonal relationship is as Harry holds God responsible for the accident.

Eccles has faith in Rabbit's capacity to redeem himself. Eccles meets Mrs. Springer, Harry's mother-in-law. He gives her hope that Harry will come back and says, "That he is a good man for one thing." (Updike. *Rabbit Run* 130). "He'll come back for the same reason he left. He's fastidious. He has to loop the loop. The world he's in now, the world of this girl in Brewer, won't continue to satisfy his fantasies. Just in seeing him from week to week, I've noticed a change" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 135). He emphasizes his point by saying, "The strange thing about Angstrom, he's by nature a domestic creature" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 135). That is to say he wants family life and this nature of him will soon make him come back. When Mrs. Springer feels that Eccles is justifying Harry's actions Eccles says, "I think his behavior has no justification. This isn't to say, though, that his behavior doesn't have reasons, reasons that in part your daughter could have controlled. With my Church, I believe that we are all responsible beings, responsible for ourselves and for each other" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 132). What he tries to say is one should always act in a responsible way. No one can disown their actions. Still there are reasons that may not justify human actions, and yet they may explain why they behave the way they do, to their own detriment. Eccles adds, "I feel Harry is in some respects a special case" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 133). To which she replies, "The only thing special about him is he doesn't care who he hurts or how much" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 133). Mrs. Springer, Janice's mother asks him, "Well if the world is going to be full of Harry Angstroms how much longer do you think they'll need your church?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 132). While Mrs. Springer holds Harry responsible for his reckless behavior and his lack of tolerance for inability of life, Eccles tries to explain it by finding reasons with more sympathy.

Eccles also meets Harry's parents and tries to inculcate in them some kind of faith for their son. He says to them, "There's a great deal of goodness in your son" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 141). Unlike his mother Harry's father was angry at Harry's behavior and says, ". . . him living in sin with a tart like that" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 141). Eccles tries to reassure them that he'll be back. It is quit ironic that the Episcopal minister Eccles does not give upon Harry and remains more optimistic about Harry's expected reform while his mother in law and father are more accusatory towards him.

THESIS

Religion does not function as an anesthetic that removes all kinds of human pain. On meeting Harry, Eccles says, "All vagrants think they are on a quest. At least at first" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 110). "Christianity isn't looking for a rainbow. If it were what you think it is, we'd pass out opium at services. We're trying to serve God, not *be* God" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 115). What Eccles understands of Harry's behavioral problem is that he lacks strong faith to acknowledge human weakness in himself which can set him on a path of redemption. Eccles asks, "Do you believe in God?" Rabbit answers without hesitation, "Yes." Eccles blinks in surprise "Do you think, then, that God wants you to make your wife suffer?" Rabbit says, "Let me ask you. Do you think God wants a waterfall to be a tree?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 92). Eccles says after thought. "But I think He wants a little tree to become a big tree" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 93). Eccles' attempt is to set Harry on the road of self-correction. In another conversation with Harry, Eccles tells him, "I don't think even the blackest atheist has an idea of what real separation will be. Outer darkness. What we live in you might call . . . inner darkness" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 109). Eccles knows that Harry has lost his faith and Harry wants to show that he knows what separation from God is, so Eccles tries to tell Harry that you or even "the blackest atheist" just cannot have an idea of what it is to be separated from God, to be abandoned by God.

Eccles after meeting both the families decides to meet Kruppenbach who is the minister of the church to which Angstroms belong. Unlike Eccles, Kruppenbach is not at all interested in this family matter. Eccles says, "It's a problem that involves our two congregations" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 144). "The boy's problem wasn't so much a lack of feeling as an uncontrolled excess of it," (Updike *Rabbit Run* 145). Eccles from the beginning has been trying his best to unite the broken family. He tries to find solutions to Harry's unstable life and faith and in search of those solutions he goes from person to person and now comes to meet Kruppenbach with the hope that Kruppenbach may offer him some solution. On the contrary, he finds that Kruppenbach thinks differently.

Kruppenbach indifferently declares, ". . . do you think this is your job, to meddle in these people's lives? I know what they teach you at seminar now: this psychology and that. But I don't agree with it. You think now your job is to be an

unpaid doctor, to run around and plug up holes and make everything smooth. I don't think that. I don't think that's your job" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 146). Kruppenbach says,

I've listened to your story but I wasn't listening to what it said about the people, I was listening to what it said about you. What I heard was this: the story of a minister of God selling his message for a few scraps of gossip and a few games of golf. What do you think now it looks to God, one childish husband leaving one childish wife? Do you ever think any more what God sees? Or have you grown beyond that? (Updike *Rabbit Run* 146)

This psychotogization of faith does not appeal to Kruppenbach. To which Eccles replies, "No, of course not. But it seems to me our role in a situation like this-" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 146). Kruppenbach says, "It seems to you our role is to be cops, cops without handcuffs, without guns, without anything but our human good nature . . . let the cops be cops and look after their laws that have nothing to do with us." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 146). Kruppenbach thunders,

I say you don't know what your role is or you'd be home locked in prayer. *There* is your role: to make yourself an exemplar of faith. There is where comfort comes from; faith, not what little finagling a body can do here and there, stirring the bucket. In running back and forth you run from the duty given you by God, to make your faith powerful so when the call comes you can tell them, 'Yes, he is dead, but you will see him again in heaven. Yes, you suffer, but you must *love* your pain, for it is *Christ's* pain.' When on Sunday morning then, when we go before their faces, we must walk up not worn out with misery but full of Christ, hot . . . with Christ, on fire: burn them with the force of our belief. That is why they come; why else would they pay us? Anything else we can do or say anyone can do and say. They have doctors and lawyers for that. It's all in the Book—a thief with faith is worth all the Pharisees. Make no mistake. Now I'm serious. Make no mistake. There is nothing but Christ for us. All the rest, all this decency and busyness, is nothing. It is Devil's work. (Updike *Rabbit Run* 146-147)

Kruppenbach is of the view that faith is of ultimate importance. Death is something that eventually occurs in everybody's lives. The concept of death has always remained obscure, mysterious, superstitious and controversial, because it differs according to religious beliefs. According to religious beliefs, while the body gets corrupted and dissolved, the soul is incapable of corruption and dispersion or dissolution. It is believed that death is harmless to the people of God. In fact the happiness of heaven begins immediately after death. Suffering also plays an important role in religions. Suffering is explained as a penalty inflicted on man for his sins by God. Suffering is also believed to be a way to earn relief, spiritual advancement and ultimately salvation. And it is quite natural that human beings desire to earn their salvation. Therefore, suffering is redemptive. It is supposed to bring sinners closer to God. According to Christianity Christ took upon himself the sufferings of the world for all the sins done by the entire humanity. Kruppenbach believes only faith can give you comfort. Faith can lessen your sufferings. There is nothing without faith and even a morally upright person with no faith is useless. And if a thief has faith he is much better than the ethically good persons. And that ministers' foremost duty is towards church and they should succeed in it.

Hence, Eccles gets no help from Kruppenbach. After seeing Kruppenbach's attitude and after listening to him, Eccles thinks that Kruppenbach is not adequate for Harry's situation. He still feels that he should try to bring them together. His wife asks him as to why he is bothered about Harry who is not even in his church. To which Eccles replies, "Any Christian is in my church" (Updike. *Rabbit Run* 228). Eccles believes, "The truth shouldn't be able to hurt us. These words are a shadow of his idea that if faith is true, then nothing that is true is in conflict with faith" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 229). On the other hand, his wife Lucy thinks, "Christianity. It's really a very neurotic religion" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 206). Lucy's disgust is a result of her disappointment with her husband who is more concerned about others rather than her. He has a lot of time for people in his church but has no time for people in his family. He is putting a lot of effort in reuniting Harry with his wife but is putting no effort in uniting himself with his own wife Lucy.

Despite the fact that Eccles believes in religion and believes that marriage should be saved, he is not able to keep his own wife happy. Ironically his energy and

passion is spent in his service for the Church, making his wife feel deprived of his attention. She feels,

. . . she never saw his gaiety, it was all spent on other people, on this grim intangible parish, her enemy. She hates them, all those clinging quaint quavering widows and Young People for Christ—the one good thing if the Russians take over is they'll make religion go extinct. It should have gone extinct a hundred years ago. Maybe it shouldn't have, maybe our weakness needs it, but let somebody else carry it on. On Jack it was so dreary. Sometimes she feels sorry for him. . . . (Updike *Rabbit Run* 162)

It can be said that Eccles, Kruppenbach, Lucy, Janice and above all Harry Rabbit Angstrom all have their conceptions of faith and its purpose different from one another's. Eccles and Kruppenbach do have faith. Eccles' faith is combined with welfare of others. For him the purpose of religious faith is also to help people in their problems. For Kruppenbach faith is something that has only to do with the Divine and is in no way related to interpersonal relationships. Harry has lost his faith after the death of his daughter. Lucy has no faith because she feels that religious faith deprives her of her husband's attention. To say who is right and who is not is to judge the characters. Updike never judges his characters. Any attempt to judge Rabbit runs into the Kierkegaardian notion that ". . . every truth is nevertheless truth only to a certain degree; when it goes beyond, the counterpoint appears, and it becomes untruth" (Ahearn 67). So, it's better to leave it unresolved just like the ending of *Rabbit, Run*.

Rabbit is presented as a genuine seeker after religious truth, and certainly his plight is genuine enough. Sport has failed him; sex fails him; religion offers hope....Even Rabbit's sinning has touches of inverse piety. While with his whore one Sunday morning he prays silently and teases her into a discussion about the existence of God. . . . He also wonders how God can do or permit evil. . . . However, faith too fails him, and he is left with a feeling that he is near death, that death is nothingness, and that even in life he is dead. (Yates 472)

“. . . *Rabbit, Run* is the fullest expression of Updike's skepticism. Doubt born of anxiety finally overwhelms faith in Rabbit. . . .” (Yates 474). Updike once explained, “Rabbit is not a formal Christian, really. He’s been exposed to it, but he proceeds by more basic notions: an instinctiveness that somehow life must be important, even though there’s no eternal confirmation of this—only the belief that the reality within must matter and must be served” (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 20).

In the Beauty of the Lilies another masterpiece by Updike also deals with the loss of faith. The title is taken from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic” by Julia Ward Howe. It gives us a vivid portrayal of loss of religious faith. It shows how doubts compel a pastor to submit to merciless facts of irreligion. It chronicles four generations of Wilmot family, from a minister to a mail carrier to an actress to a religious cult member. Each chapter is named after the character who is central to that particular era. Every character connects to God. Among all the characters Clarence is most interesting and his view of God is shocking. In a way Clarence thinks, why believe in religion when science seems to be offering more solutions. The revelations about the world that science provides make him question his faith. As Ingersoll writes,

It is a part of their business to malign and vilify the Voltaires, Humes, Paines, Humboldts, Tyndalls, Haeckels, Darwins, Spencers, and Drapers....They are, for the most part, engaged in poisoning the minds of the young, prejudicing children against science, teaching the astronomy and geology of the Bible, and inducing all to desert the sublime standard of reason. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 14)

Doubts start lingering in his mind and he stops reading because it mocks faith.

The story begins with a happy family of five. Clarence Wilmot is the model clergyman. He has a wife and three children. Everything goes fine until he loses faith in the Church and becomes an apostate. There has been gradual questioning and enquiry of mind that leads to the loss of faith. “. . . Reverend Clarence Arthur Wilmot, down in the rectory of the Fourth Presbyterian Church at the corner of Straight Street

and Broadway, felt the last particles of his faith leave him. The sensation was distinct – a visceral surrender, a set of dark sparkling bubbles escaping upward" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 5).

. . . oval flashes of blind reflection-slipped in Clarence's mind to the similarly pugnacious and bald-crowned visage of Robert Ingersoll, the famous atheist whose *Some Mistakes of Moses* the minister had been reading in order to refute it for a perturbed parishioner; from this perceived similarity his thoughts had slipped with quicksilver momentum into the recognition, which he had long withstood, that Ingersoll was quite right: the God of the Pentateuch was an absurd bully, barbarically thundering through a cosmos entirely misconceived. There is no such God, nor should there be. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 5).

He struggles within himself for quite a long time. Eventually gives up. "Clarence mind was like a many-legged, wingless insect that had long and tediously been struggling to climb up the walls of a slick-walled porcelain basin; and now a sudden impatient wash of water swept it down into the drain. *There is no God*" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 5-6).

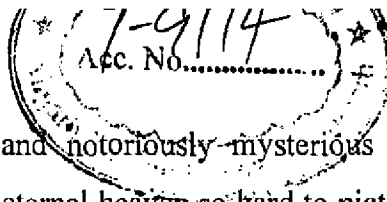
Clarence is disturbed by absence of faith inside. He is in dilemma as to "where would they go without his faith to carry them? His faith was what paid their way" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 11). His livelihood depends on it. He is not sure what should he do. Initially he doesn't discuss it with anyone and is struggles within himself. ". . . it seemed that the invisible vestiges of the faith and the vocation he had struggled for decades to maintain against the grain of the Godless times and his own persistent rationalist suspicions now of their pulverized weightlessness lifted and wafted. . . . It was a ghastly moment, a silent sounding of bottomlessness" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 6).

Life's sounds all rang with a curious lightness and flatness, as if a resonating base beneath them had been removed. They told Clarence Wilmot what he had long suspected, that the universe was utterly indifferent to his states of mind and as empty of divine

content as a corroded kettle. All its metaphysical content had leaked away, but for cruelty and death, which without the hypothesis of a God became unmetaphysical; they became simply facts, which oblivion would in time obviously erase. Oblivion became a singular comforter. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 7)

It makes him question "The clifflike riddle of predestination-How can Man have free will without impinging upon God's perfect freedom? How can God condemn Man when all actions from alpha to omega are His very own? . . . In the purifying sweep of atheism human beings lost all special value. . . . Without Biblical blessing the physical universe became sheerly horrible and disgusting" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 7). Such mind baffling questions about predestination and human free will contradicted each other. To him they are totally irreconcilable, reaching to the question that such situation can only negate God's existence. There is a contrast between the inner turmoil in the clergyman's heart and the outer reality. Despite "the pitch-smooth black of utter hopelessness," the exterior environment remains unaffected. Human heart 'unmistakably yearn' for eternal heaven: but for Clarence a belief in heaven and hell is of paramount importance, as this is the pre-requisite of his profession. He is not sure as to what he should ascribe his faithlessness. He starts asking whether his faithlessness is his own fault or it is God's will, because all actions depend upon God's will and not on man's. He is worried because he knows whatever he has now would be taken from him when discloses his faithlessness. His loss of faith is like an ailment in his heart. It is like a wound.

The . . . clergyman numbed by his sudden atheism . . . let his unspeakable wound be soothed by the blameless activity. . . . He stood baffled, looking about the dining room for some exterior sign of the fatal alteration within him. *There is no God*. With a wink of thought, the universe had been bathed in the pitch-smooth black of utter hopelessness. Yet no exterior change of color betrayed the event. The mahogany dining table . . . Tiffany-glass chandelier...brown wallpaper, unchanged since the manse was built . . . none of these mute surfaces reflected the sudden absence of God from the universe-His legions of angels, His sacrificed Son,



His ever-watchful and notoriously mysterious Providence. His ultimate mercy, the eternal heaven so hard to picture yet for which our hearts so unmistakably yearn, the eternal Hell which even calm, gentle, reasonable Calvin could not conceive as other than indispensable to God's justice . . . the house's furnishings stood unchanged, temporarily enclosing and protecting the clergyman and his family. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 10-11)

It is his strange kind of honesty that cannot let him hold onto his profession in the absence of faith. No one can see the change taking place inside him. His surrounding also does not betray the phenomenal transformation his heart and mind undergo. It is his own honest attitude which may be towards the profession or to himself, which ensured his professional and financial decline also.

He thinks about his home, about his family and he does realize that the life style that they are used to will no longer be there. The elegant house, its furnishings will be taken back. ". . . for few of these elegant . . . furnishings . . . they came with the parsonage and would pass to the use of the next minister and his brood" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 11).

Clarence's failure is about his inability to go on with his profession by achieving a level of hypocrisy. A conflict is going on in the mind of Clarence. He tries to find solace in his books. "He was safe among books, books, which had so much danger in them" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 13). He thinks about the verses of the Bible.

Bare, pure, devoid: even the Bible contained the information, in its less exegized verses. *All is vanity and vexation of spirit. How dieth the wise man? As the fool. If Christ be not raised, your faith is vain. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. My God, my God, why has thou forsaken me?* Clarence had preached on these texts, sought with his striving, affecting, rather fragile tenor voice to find the way around them, but there was, it now clearly appeared, no way. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 12)

He agrees with Ingersoll that ministers as "... husbands and fathers are forced to preach a doctrine they hold in scorn" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 13). It is not faith but financial reality that makes them perform the duty of preaching the doctrine of their faith.

He says to himself,

Well, not exactly in scorn. In pity, more. The doctrine had for these years past felt to Clarence like an invalid, a tenuous ghost scattered invisibly among the faces that . . . beseeched him for hope and courage, for that thing which Calvin . . . called *la grace*. Grace Clarence had pictured when his faith was healthy as an interplay between man and God, achieved within the mystery — imagined as a glass globe . . . Christ and His placation of that otherwise ineradicable sin inherited from Adam, leaving men with, in a phrasing Clarence had once found delightful, "a lively tendency to disobey God." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 13)

He thinks that "*Introduction to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, lost in this wall of accumulated titles, should have fortified him forever against Ingersoll's easy sneers. . . ." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 14). "There was a tide behind these books that crested in mad Nietzsche and sickly Darwin and boil-plugged Marx" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 15-16). "... the nineteenth century had been a long erosion, and the books of this century that a conscientious clergyman collected . . . Clarence now saw as so much flotsam and rubble, perishing and adrift, pathetic testimony to the belief's flailing attempt not to drown" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 16).

It is easy to blame books for his loss of faith. But this interpretation does not satisfy because if that is the case then whosoever reads these books by Ingersoll, Darwin etc should have lost their faith. But certainly it is not so. These books cannot be proscribed. What is needed is a strong will to keep faith intact, to protect it as a treasure which makes life easier for the likes of Clarence. Clarence is gullible. Clarence himself realizes his fault.

The fault was in himself. Not Darwin or Nietzsche or Ingersoll or scientific materialism...was to blame for his collapse, this invasion of his soul by the void: the failure was his own, an effeminate yielding where virile strength was required. Faith is a force of will whereby a Christian defines himself against the temptations of an age. Each age presents its own competing philosophies, the equivalents of Godless stoicism and hedonism, of Mithraism and astrology, of ecstatic and murderous and obscene cults. . . .
(Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 17-18)

When Clarence says to Mr. Dreaver, "I did not *wish* to lose my faith, the reasons came upon me, irresistibly, from outside. They came from above" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 81). Mr. Dreaver does not agree with him and says, "Much of what we blame on the above comes from within" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 81).

The hope that this phase of faithlessness will pass and he will be back to his vocation is no longer there. "Hope is our sap. . . . Clarence had lost his sap — not suddenly but over the nearly twenty years since seminary. . . . It had been his vow, his vocation, to keep the faith, and he felt his failure within him as an extensive sore place. . . . " (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 20). This 'extensive sore place' demands attention from Clarence; it needs a healing touch which Clarence cannot afford in the absence of faith.

Clarence tries everything possible to restore faith and finally gives up. Whatever was there in his mind till now, he speaks it out. "The now-crusty wound of faithlessness was still there in his consciousness. . . . *There is no God*. Croakily, Clarence ventured his first utterance aloud. . . . "Have mercy," he whispered, smiling at the futile sound of it" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 24).

Though this absence of faith is not perceptible in the exterior, Clarence's wife can sense the change in him. Stella is able to refute him aptly. If Clarence's objection to Christian virtues are that they fail to distribute wealth and resources among all people, Stella's attack is on Ingersoll who despite his criticism of Christian values that

make the rich ever richer and the poor even poorer, himself lived a smug and comfortable life.

Clarence's wife observes a change in his behavior and the way he talks. She says, "Clarence, you're sounding sinful!" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 41). And Clarence replies "Aren't these so-called Christian virtues just as Ingersoll and the radicals claim, an excuse for doing nothing, a way to keep the poor quiet while the rich get richer?" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 41). Stella tells him, "I've never read a word of Ingersoll and don't intend to. He mocked God yet went on living off the fat of a land made prosperous by God-fearing men and women. And you shouldn't be reading him either — something's troubling you, everybody noticed it. . . ." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 41). Clarence says, "Ah, Stella, I don't half know what my mind is any more" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 41). He says this because he doesn't want to confess "Godlessness within him" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 41). Stella, Clarence's wife seems to be clever enough to see the double standard writer maintained between his theory and action i.e. his lifestyle.

After carrying his "Godlessness within him" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 41). Clarence decides to unburden his heart by an open confession. Clarence says to his wife,

My faith, my dear seems to have fled. I not only no longer believe with an ideal fervor, I consciously disbelieve. My very voice rebelled, today, against my attempting to put some sort of good face on a doctrine that I intellectually detest. Ingersoll, Hume, Darwin, Renan, Nietzsche-it all rings true, when you've read enough to have it sink in; they have not just reason on their side but simple humanity and decency as well. Jehovah and His pet Israelites, that bloody tit-for-tat of the Atonement, the whole business of condemning poor fallible men and women to eternal Hell for a few mistakes in their lifetimes, the notion in any case that our spirits can survive without eyes or brains or nerves- Stel, it's been a fearful struggle, I've twisted my mind in loops to hold on to some sense in which these things are true enough to preach, but I've let go or go crazy. I love you for feeling otherwise, and

would never argue a man or child out of whatever they believe, but to me it's all become relics, things left over from our childish nightmares, when there's daylight now all around us- this is the twentieth century! I can't keep selling myself and others the opposite of what jumps out of me from every newspaper and physical fact I see. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 61)

His wife Stella tries her best to convince him that this is just a phase and it too shall pass. Stella says to him, "Reason isn't everything. There are things beyond it. Believing isn't supposed to be easy" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 61). As is also said by Kierkegaard, "Faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off" (Idinopolous *Erosion of Faith* 50). Stella's point is that one should work hard to keep faith alive. Clarence replies, "I love the old words, but now they lie dead in me. I don't quite know what has slain them – the infidel modern times, perhaps, or simply my years, it may be, and the fatigue with which the years tax my system – but dead the words are. . . ." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 62). She adds optimistically, "With God all things are possible. Perhaps your fatigue will pass, and these are doubts with it" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 62). To which Clarence replies, "They are not doubts, alas-they are certainties. . . . I fear if I continue to speak I will take hope and reassurance away from those that can still believe" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 62). Stella would like to believe that it is a passing phase in her husband's life. She says, "Clarence: we all have moments when life seems empty and not worthwhile. But they pass; we push through them. . . ." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 62). Stella argues with him, "Faith is something we *build*; it's a *habit*" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 65). Stella believes in cultivating faith as a good habit which only proves that to her also it is not something natural that happens to human beings. To her faith is a matter of habit formation so Clarence finally may end up fixing faith by a conscious habit formation.

Although he was suggested by his friend Mr. Dearholt to continue preaching without letting anybody know that he has lost faith but he refuses. Mr. Dearholt says, "Out of your gullible nature you've let the enemy infect your thinking, my friend. Think of your state of mind as a disease. You need to convalesce, to rest" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 68). He even admits that his going will be a loss to him. He

says, "We don't want to lose you in the Almighty's ongoing battle, Clarence" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 69). For Dearholt,

[Faith] is not some merely intellectual choice. It is basic human strength. It is manliness, and womanliness. It gives courage and cheer from the infant's first steps to the aged's last breath. Without it, we're not alive, Reverend Wilmot. Without it, we're the servant who buries his talent in the ground. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 70)

Mr. Dearholt considers faith as an essential part of human existence, a kind of biological development like walking and breathing one's last. Mr. Dearholt equates faith with vitalism and a kind of necessary optimism that sustains life till the end. For Clarence, faith is a matter of intellectual inquiry.

Clarence may not be a devout believer but he is also not a hypocrite. Clarence says, ". . . my respect for the church is still enough that I don't intend to pollute its pulpit with hypocrisy" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 63). This was reflected earlier also in his statement in front of the committee in which he says, "Seriously, a church is a community whose strength lies in purity and zeal, not in its buildings" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 37).

Mr. Thomas Dreaver, the moderator of the presbytery takes this situation as something normal to human condition as interpreted by religion. "Unfaith is a cohort of faith, as Satan is a cohort of God" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 75). He even gives him one year's probation so that he can retrieve his faith. Clarence says, "The things of faith for me have totally evaporated" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 80). Mr. Dreaver replies, "What evaporates can recondense" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 81). Mr. Dreaver asks him, "Is the necessity of at least one more year in the clergy so repugnant to you?" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 82). Clarence replies, "No — it is pleasant. I know the tasks; they are the only tasks I do know. My poor distressed family will be very pleased. I myself am relieved. But it seems to me you are directing me to behave with blatant hypocrisy" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 82). Dreaver says,

I am asking you to carry for twelve mere more months responsibilities you solemnly vowed to undertake for a lifetime. Please Mr. Wilmot—renounce your intellectual pride and give God's grace a chance to do its work. This is not hypocrisy, but the meekness that every man in his work offers up to the order of things, whether divinely ordained or not. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 82)

At the end of year's probation Clarence feels no renewal of either his vocation or his faith. And he quits the pulpit. As expected everything which he owns is taken back from him and he and his family are left at God's mercy. They go through a bad time. He ends up selling encyclopedias from door to door. Stella says, "You have cold-bloodedly decided to inflict on your family an entirely needless sacrifice" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 64). Clarence renounces all the privileges he had as a priest which proves his honesty as well as the finality of his stepping out of the Church.

One day while selling encyclopedias he meets his ex-maid Mavis and she calls him "Reverend Wilmot" and he replies, "No longer Reverend" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 96). Mavis asks, "Did you truly say you were no longer a reverend?" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 97). Clarence replies, "I gave it up. . . . Or you could say it gave me up" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 97). Mavis is quite amazed and says, "How could that be? The fine big house, and you looking and acting the part like a man born to it" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 97). Clarence replies, "Ah, acting the part exactly. It often happens that man cannot hold on to what they were born to. I no longer measured up to even my own standards of good faith" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 97). He further adds, "God doesn't need a big target, He can hit an hour-old infant square on the nose. . . . I shouldn't be blaspheming. I shouldn't still be using that terrible old word God" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 101). "Finding himself close to tears, he wondered, as he often had in the pulpit, how much of a shameless actor he was" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 101).

In Clarence the vacuum created by faith is too big to remain empty and gradually, he starts finding solace in the movies. "Within the movie theatre, amid the

other scarcely seen slumped bodies, he felt released from accusation" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 104). Clarence feels, "The passionate, comical, swift-moving action on the screen, speckled with bright scratches, entered him like an essential food which he had been hitherto denied" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 104). With movies he feels as if he is altogether in a new world but when it ends he has no choice but to face the reality. He says, "Watching the movies took no strength, but recovering from them did-climbing again out of their scintillating bath into the bleak facts of life, his life, gutted by God's withdrawal" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 107). It feels as if he is living only for this one hour and craving for this time of the day to come. "... the drained face of an addict enduring his days for the one hour in which he could forget, in a trance as infallible as opium's, his fall, his failure, his disgrace, his immediate responsibilities, his ultimate nullity. Have Mercy" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 108). Eventually he dies of tuberculosis. He dies without showing any sign of rehabilitation of faith.

Human logic can relate to its moral nature in a twofold manner. On the one hand, a human being may accept it as a fact and be satisfied to have found that this is how things are, without asking how and on the basis of what grounds they become what they are. One might think that one's highest vocation is what is represented to one as such by this inner compulsion and to act unfailingly in accordance with his faith. On the other hand, one may refuse to remain content with the immediate perception and may demand to know the grounds of what one has perceived. When one tries to see how it originates, things become problematic as it happens in case of Clarence. Clarence loses his faith because he questions. Applying rationality to find answers does not provide us with the power to change anything. Populated by lost souls, the novel reassesses the crucial role of faith and depicts the longing for faith.

The most interesting as well as shocking aspect of the novel is that a person trained to believe in God denies his existence. Priests are supposed to be God's chosen ones. The question arises as to how God can choose such people whose faith wavers after sometime. If ordinary people do so, it will not harm others but a preacher whom people trust and look up to him, if he does it, it will have an adverse effect on laity, the common people. The characters are such that readers can relate to them. Updike has very well narrated this saga in which to a certain extent he held cinema or

illusion responsible for the loss of faith. It can be said that in both the illusionary forces, religion and cinema the darkness is vanquished by light. There has to be something that must fill the vacuum. When one's faith is eliminated, a new god will rush in to fill the spiritual void. As movies did in case of Clarence.

A Month of Sundays probes into faith of an unconventional and an idiosyncratic minister Tom Marshfield. Like Clarence Tom Marshfield also seems to have lost his grip on faith. Despite this similarity it is very evident by reading the novels that both the cases are as different as chalk and cheese as the novels reveal. Clarence loses his faith due to his intellectual probing and skepticism that were never satisfied by the religious scripture. Tom Marshfield's problem with faith is his susceptibility to temptations as he himself says: "[Faith] doesn't seem to apply" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 172). It is actually not able to restrain him. He is the kind of preacher no congregation wants. He is in a sanatorium recovering from his crisis of faith. He tells his father, "Something has gone wrong. I have no faith. Or, rather I have faith, but it doesn't seem to apply" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 172). The book takes its title from the month that Tom spends at the sanatorium to which he refers to as a motel. He feels relieved from his duty in this place. "A potential topic: touch and the sacred. God as Supreme Disease. . . . Germs and the altar. The shared chalice versus the disposable paper culpet: how many hours of my professional life have been chewed to bitter shreds . . . by this liturgical debate. . . . I am free of that, for a month or forever. Good criddence" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 5). At this place, he is not allowed to read Bible and no one can visit him during his stay here. "The Bible above all is banned. No religion, no visitors, no letters in or out" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 6). As a part of his treatment, he has to write every day. His daily entries taken together make up an autobiographical sketch of Tom Marshfield. He reflects on his past life, the scandals which led him here, with the joys of the flesh and the throes of the spirit. "He cannot say what he means because he doesn't know what he means; his mind wanders erratically over the memories of his life, unable to focus for long on any reality and always returning grotesquely at last to the two instinctual constants of his world: sex and religion" (Detweiler 611).

He is tormented by questions about his religious belief and his own place in life. He says, "I had been a kind of afterthought, a mistake. My very existence was

some sort of jape . . . none could explain the riddle of my existence” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 19). As a result, from a priest he becomes a womanizer. He gets sexually involved with the women with the excuse of helping them and solving their problems. “I love myself and loathe myself more than other men. One of these excesses attracts women, but which?” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 9). The novel notoriously discusses lust, the deadly sin with which the protagonist is trying to cope up.

The Reverend Thomas Marshfield, protagonist-narrator of the novel, is a sexual misfit whose sexual relations with his wife are perfunctory and unfulfilling, whose vigorous performances with his mistress, the church organist, grow from an immature and irresponsible attitude, and whose assignations with yet another lover from the congregation are marked by his impotence. He is a voyeur, an inveterate masturbator, and an obsessive sexual fantasizer. (Detweiler 610)

The novel takes into account the lust and Godlessness that are characteristics of a pulpit whose pastor is Marshfield. The writing style of the novel is orotund and it bears arcane ecclesiastical stretch. Reverend Tom Marshfield muses on the subjects of life, death, sex, God, husbands and wives, adultery, faith, skepticism, Christianity and Karl Barth. He says, “Reading Barth gives me air I can breathe” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 90). It reveals his thought processes.

A Month of Sundays is a story of an adulterous, blasphemous, wayward, goatish, despicable and defrocked minister. The novel contains depictions of human weakness and commingling of the licentious with the liturgical. Despite being humorous, the novel evokes serious questions about belief and unbelief. The protagonist tells us, “In general the churches visited by me too often on weekdays...bore for me the same relation to God that billboards did to Coco-Cola: they promoted thirst without quenching it” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 22). He says about Doctor Reverend Wesley Augustus Chillingworth, his professor of ethics at the divinity school, that, “His course epitomized everything I hated about academic religion; it’s safe and complacent faithlessness, its empty difficulty, its transformation of the tombstones of the passionate dead into a set of hurdles for the living to leap on their way to an underpaid antique profession” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 50). He

blasphemously declares that God “. . . has His way of siding with the winners. . . .” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 40). Marshfield conceives God as an opportunist. For him his visits to churches never quench his thirst for faith, they rather aggravated it instead of quenching. His association with the Church for him is some kind of an “underpaid antique profession.” He should behave like an axiological model but he adulterates the religion to acclimatize his needs. “As a pastor, Marshfield is also a misfit, confused about his personal faith. . . .” (Detweiler 611).

It seems that Tom Marshfield becomes a minister by some freak of fate. He says, “My father’s house bred in me a belief in God, which has made my life one long glad feast of inconvenience and unreason” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 21). On being asked by Alicia “What would you have been, if you hadn’t been a minister?” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 65). He replies, “A gigolo? A prison warden? A private detective? The first is immodest, the second is self-rebuke, the third an honest boyhood ambition” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 65). But now he does not want to give up his vocation for anything else. He says, “What would I do, outside the ministry? It’s my life. It’s my afterlife” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 67). While Clarence sacrifices his financial security for honesty, Tom Marshfield does not want to renounce the comforts he is accustomed to.

So from his point of view he is still a believer although he does not behave like one. He says, “. . . a priest is more than a man, and though the man disintegrate within his vestments, and become degraded beyond the laxest of his flock, the priest can continue to perform his functions, as a scarecrow performs his” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 210). Tom Marshfield performs his duty even when he knows within, that he has become a mockery of the Christian virtue of purity and chastity and that while he performs his duties he has lost his soul just like “a scarecrow.” As far as he remembers he has never failed in his duty. He says, “I have never knowingly failed to honor the supreme, the hidden commandment, which is . . . Take Pleasure and make of it Pain . . . Suspect each moment, for it is a Thief, Tiptoeing away with More than it Brings; Question all Questions; Doubt all Doubts. . . .” (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 6). Marshfield’s condition states the problem of the ineffability of sex and religion. His sermons are the examples of the way one can reason the Bible to mean anything. In this way, even adultery can be turned from a sin into a virtue.

His preaching is an exploration of the nature and challenges of religious faith in contemporary America. He says, "At all points Ned, the world presses us toward despair and forgetfulness of God. At no point, perhaps, more than here, in this empty church" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 71). "If this society strikes you as criminal, remember the criminal on the cross . . . pray to the true God, the God above change, the God who destroyed Rome and Christendom, the God who jealously reserves to His own kingdom the new Jerusalem of perfect equality and justice. . . ." (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 71). To him, God is as culpable as humans can be. It is not his concern for social welfare or common good or any Marxist question about distribution of wealth but just a hedonistic will which makes Tom Marshfield mock religious injunctions. He says, "Let us sentimentalize neither the rich nor the poor. If their assets were reversed, they would act like one another. The material world, viewed spiritually, is a random grid. Wherever we are placed within it, our task is to witness, to offer a way out of the crush of matter and time. . . ." (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 70). And this is what he is trying to do in the sanatorium, finding his way out. As part of his therapy he has to preach sermons. One day when he is to preach upon the miracles. He says,

For our lord produced miracles as naturally as the Earth produces flowers. Miracles fell from Him as drops of water escape between the fingers of a man drinking from his cupped hands. . . . He condescended to cure, there named blindness, dumbness, dropsy, leprosy, impotence, fever, deformity, issue of blood, madness—a piteous catalogue, and no doubt partial. It is here, not upon the plausibility of these miracles . . . but upon their selectivity, that we stumble. (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 103)

His entire sermon is full of skepticism. For Marshfield, miracles are selective and partial. He says, "The hard lesson is borne upon us, alleviation is not the purpose of His miracles, but demonstration. Their randomness is not their defect, but their essence, as injustice . . . is essential to a Creation of differentiated particulars" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 104-105). He asks as to why the miracles were performed only in ancient times and not now and why they were performed selectively. Or was it the right of only earlier generations or is it that only in the olden

times we had sinners and sick people and now since there are no sinners and no patients so miracles are not needed. He asks, "Well, are we not such a faithless and perverse generation? A generation of falling men, of starving men, of bleeding women, of drowning Peters? (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 106). He says that if in the earlier times there were saints who prayed for miracles, even today there are many saints who are continuously praying. Then "Why has the perfect and playful faith that Christ demonstrated in his miracles never come again, though saints have prayed in these two thousand years, and tortures have smiled?" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 106). He opines that the "... special world of God within the Bible is an oasis world; the world beyond ... is a desert" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 162). And "... there is more desert now than at any era in the earth's billions of years" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 163). "Now we dwell within the desert" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 162). That is to say that we need more miracles in contemporary times. He dares to ask the hard questions of religion and to search them out, and has suffered morally and spiritually as a result.

Tom Marshfield disappoints everybody by raking more doubts about belief in miracles rather than endorsing it in his sermons. Regarding his own son he says, "I embarrassed him, with my overly agonistic sermons, my devious irony, my sense of the priest as fool and scapegoat" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 122). His father scolds him, "... you laggard ... prick-sick, Mooney, you're sickly, and that's no mistake. Deceit has done you in. That's the trick about sin, it does in the doer" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 127). So, basically he is condemned as sick by people and is therefore sent in the sanatorium.

Updike juxtaposes sex and theology. The novel has layers of symbolism and Biblical references such as the Omega-shaped sanatorium. Tom, the priest is supposed to convince the agnostic people into belief but he himself does not believe in the existence of God. The way he tries to convince Frankie about the non-existence of God shows he is doing just the opposite of his duty. He asks Frankie, "Do you believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of Heaven and Earth?" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 154). She admits, "Yes" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 154). He commands, "Say you don't" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 155). He asks, "How can you believe, Frankie? How can any sane person?" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 155). She answers,

"Many do. Then amended, Some do" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 155). He makes fun of trinity, "It's *so* ridiculous." (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 155). He asks her, ". . . how can you be so dumb as to believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost?" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 156-157). He is a non-believer and tries to shake Frankie's faith. A believer thinks not only about this life but also about the next life and Tom is a person who believes only in this life and not in afterlife. He wants to live his fully and does not want to give up worldly pleasures for the sake of afterlife. He remarks, "For we do not want to live as angels in ether; our bodies are us, us; and our craving for immortality is . . . a craving not for transformation into a life beyond imagining but for our *ordinary life*, the mundane life we so driftingly and numbly live, to go on forever and forever. The only Paradise we can imagine is this Earth. The only life we desire is this one" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 209). Tom Marshfield cannot imagine and believe that there is life after death.

Unlike Clarence Wilmot of *In the Beauty of the Lilies*, who wants to leave the believers undisturbed, Tom tries to take away faith of those who believe. Like Harry Rabbit Angstrom of *Rabbit, Run*, Tom strolls through the door of treachery at the beginning of his story and never makes his way back, nor really seems to desire to. Unlike Rabbit, he doesn't abdicate his grieving wife or a pregnant girlfriend and instead spends a lot of time philosophizing as to why his actions are termed as sin. Like Rabbit, Tom finds that he can captivate people especially women i.e. he can charm women.

The Poorhouse Fair, Updike's first novel, deals with the theme of need for God and for a divinely inspired sense of morality. The story takes place within a day's time from the morning till the evening. It is the day on which the inmates of Diamond County Home for the Aged organize their annual fair for which they prepare various things to sell. It describes their rebellion against the Prefect of the institution when due to rain the fair does not go well. The moral dimensions of the rebellion are enormous. It is old people's reaction against something which is a hindrance for their much awaited fair. They blame Conner, the Prefect for the mishap. It also shows old people's lack of trust on their Prefect Conner who may be strict but works for their welfare.

Conner is unconsciously a religious figure, a humanitarian. He is kind and loves order and tries to do good for the old inmates. Even after he is stoned, he forgives them. Buddy asks Conner, "What are you going to do?" (Updike *The Poorhouse Fair* 111). Conner replies, "Forgive them" (Updike *The Poorhouse Fair* 111). Buddy says, "At least you could punish their leader" (Updike *The Poorhouse Fair* 111). To which Conner replies, "I'm their leader." (Updike. *The Poorhouse Fair* 111). Symbolically, the stoning and the forgiveness can be compared to the crucifixion of a Christ.

No one is morally annihilated in this novel. The conflict of ideas, the clash of progress and tradition, benevolence and pride, reason and faith is depicted.

S. deals with a woman's loss of faith in her marriage and eventually the loss of her religious faith. It is also a burlesque of the spiritual quest. Unlike many of Updike's novels, *S.* has a female protagonist and the world is viewed from her viewpoint. It also employs a different narrative technique; it is narrated in the epistolary form. The religious dimension also includes the religions of India such as Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism.

The eponymous *S.* is Sarah Worth. Sarah has a husband, a doctor named Charles Worth and a daughter, named Pearl. As the novel opens, we find Sarah Worth on a plane to California. On being fed up with her suffocating marriage to someone who is unfaithful to her, she makes up her mind to renounce her home and to join an Indian Ashram in Arizona led by a *guru* named Arhat.

S. primarily narrates a woman's perennial attempt to rebegin. She says, "I shed you as I would shed a skin with some awkwardness perhaps and at first a sensitivity to the touch of the new, but without pain and certainly without regret" (Updike *S.* 9).

She gets no emotional satisfaction in her married life. She rejects the bonds of societal institutions such as family and marriage that have not provided her with existential purpose. Despite having all the material comfort at home she feels there is a void in her life. She writes, ". . . life is like that – lived on the skin of the void and without real substance, just motions we go through by constructing these hallucinatory goals and short-term strategies" (Updike *S.* 31). Her emotional vacuity leads her to go searching for it outside her house in the *ashram*. She writes, "I'm

making my leap into a new life" (Updike *S.* 23). In her letters and tapes, Sarah relates the circumstances that prompted her to leave domineering and philandering Charles and to seek communion with the Arhat and his band of *sannyasins* (pilgrims) on the ashram. About this kind of recourse into different cults and religion taken by people especially Americans, one of Updike's characters Tom Marshfield in *A Month of Sundays* says:

Is not even faithlessness, which once assaulted our piety with the vigor of a purer piety, now a desert beyond reclamation, a feeble and featureless wilderness where none but the most degenerate of demonic superstitions-astrology, augury, Hinduism-spring up in the hearts of the young, until they too soon cease to be young, and nurture in their blasted greenness not even these poor occult weeds? What has our technology that boasted its intention to reconstruct paradise, shown itself to be but an insidious spreader of poisons? Where has it landed us, as its triumph and emblem, but upon the most absolute desert of all, the lunar surface where not even lichen or a microbe lives? (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 94)

Tom's approach is that of a non-believer. He believes that God has his chosen ones and even if we do good we are not rewarded and the Lord's elected ones in spite of doing the wrong are not reprimanded. Also he says that Americans try to find solace in Hinduism not because they believe in it or has high regard for it but as a fad of modernism or as a desperate and clueless attempt to find solace.

Upon arriving at the commune, Sarah is given some tasks which she carries out well because of her skill and intellect. Soon she gets the name Kundalini, "the serpent of female energy dormant at the base of the spinal column" (Updike *S.* 237). Gradually she occupies an important position in the ashram. ". . . women here have power enough: the Arhat in his total goodness...grants them all of it. . . ." (Updike *S.* 131).

The impression that she initially has of this ashram is that it has nothing to do with philistinism and money matters. As Durga says, ". . . Arhat desires nothing, his name and the concept of desire should not even be put in the same sentence" (Updike

S. 32). Gradually Sarah realizes that Arhat desires and demands money from people. Arhat himself writes to one of the pilgrims, “. . . your financial savings be placed in the care of the vigilant and efficient custodians of our Treasury of Enlightenment” (Updike S. 49). Sarah writes, “What made me absolutely the *most* indignant and heartsick, though, was that snide piece about the Arhat’s limousines and wristwatches with diamond studded bands. . . . The fact is the Arhat is absolutely penniless – everything goes into the Treasury of Enlightenment and is incorporated or set up as a trust....he is so truly beyond material things . . . whatever he needs or desires will materialize” (Updike S. 82). The purpose of her coming to this commune is to beat the materialism as she says, “We are not the first and won’t be the last to beat against the tide of consumeristic materialistic capitalist garbage. . . .” (Updike S. 96). But soon she feels her attempt is in vain. She begins to lose faith in Arhat. Other pilgrims also complain about this materialism. “The former sannyasins claimed . . . after their modest living expenses were met, all the profits of their . . . activities were forwarded to our ashram” (Updike S. 125). Despite having tax-exempt status this commune demands money and donations in huge amounts which leads to the fact that the money is used for Arhat’s personal expenses.

Discovering that the *guru* as well as his ashram is a hoax, Sarah Worth feels helpless and chagrined at the end and loses her religious faith also. She writes to her mother, “Your daughter has been most cruelly deceived! Thinking I was achieving vidya, I have been floating in a sea of avidya. My disillusion came about this way:” (Updike S. 182). She further writes, “. . . how big a fool can your daughter be?” (Updike S. 185). Once Arhat claims, “*I am Arhat, a follower of Buddha*” (Updike S. 155). Now she discovers “. . . *Arhat’s real name was Art Steinmetz*, and that he was from *Massachusetts – Watertown*, to be exact” (Updike S. 183). Moreover she finds out that, “Evidently he *did* go to India and did learn Hindi and Sanskrit and some Pali and study yoga but this was all from about 1965 and then all through the Seventies, but before that he was just one more bright good Jewish boy, who even put in a few terms at Northeastern studying sales engineering and business administration before the peace movement got to him and he took off” (Updike S. 183). She accepts that, “. . . he *does* remind me a bit of Myron Stern, and that must churn up a lot of old rage and frustration in me” (Updike S. 185). Myron Stern was Sarah boyfriend to whom she wishes to marry but was parted from him because her parents find that Charles is

more suitable for her. She comments on her parents, “. . . thanks in part to the transatlantic meddling of your groom of choice, the impeccable Charles. Did you and Daddy ever feel even the littlest bit guilty about nixing the love of my life” (Updike S. 185). So now at this stage if she is reminded of Myron Stern obviously she feels the revival of “old rage and frustration” because Charles who was considered suitable turns out unsuitable for her. Arhat too is a liar. Arhat himself confesses in front of Sarah that, “. . . *I was born at Elton Avenue, of these two crazy mismatched people. There wasn't any religion around the house. . . .*” (Updike S. 191). “*I got nothing. . . . No baptism. . . . But there was something – a blank little God I carried with me like a tiny teddy bear. . . .*” (Updike S. 192). “*That was Him! – my old pal God. . . . I thanked old God and took off for India. . . . India made sense to me – Buddhism made sense to me. . . . The people that came to . . . ashram . . . were almost all of them Westerners. Why would they want to come to another Westerner?*” (Updike S. 193). He admits, “*All this spiritual responsibility is frightening*” (Updike S. 197). She is completely disillusioned and shocked and says, “When I came here, my leader in dynamic meditation kept shouting at me. ‘Who are you?’ Now I ask the same question of you, Master. Who are you?” (Updike S. 190). She calls him “. . . the pseudo-Hindu” (Updike S. 199). She tells him, “*You're the nothing. . . . You're the shunya*” (Updike S. 199). Also one of the editorials of the Forrester *Weekly Sentinel* condemns ashram as a “glorified summer camp” for “bored yuppies” and “pathetic societal strays” (Updike S. 51). At last, she decides to quit the ashram. “I've decided to leave the ashram” (Updike S. 204). “The whole town of Forrester is sinister, in fact – the flattened-out flatness of it, the stagnant brook with its cottonwoods, and then in the distance these abrupt wrinkled mountains that seem pieces of another world” (Updike S. 207). She says, “. . . the human hunger for a god will always reward those with the temerity – the inner density and vacuity – to call themselves gods” (Updike S. 219). As a result of this revelation, Sarah who has already lost her faith in relationships also loses her religious faith. And the vacuity with which she leaves her home continues to haunt her throughout her life.

The protagonists of the novels discussed in this chapter lose their faith. They lose their faith because of the circumstances they face and their faith is never restored. They may or may not be blamed for their loss of faith because circumstances play a crucial role in their lives.

Rabbit in *Rabbit Run*, is dissatisfied with his life and as a result loses faith in his marriage and also loses hope that things will improve. He is not strong enough to face the difficulties and does not take up the challenge of changing the situations for the better.

Clarence in the novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies* loses his religious faith because he is baffled by scientifically scrutinizing mind. His reading of science books cannot be blamed, what can be called as his fault is that he allows his doubts to overcome his faith. Even the fear of losing his job and accommodation does not force him to pretend that he has faith.

Marshfield in *A Month of Sundays* loses his religious faith because of his insatiable sexual urge. Moreover, he tries to interpret and manipulate religious commandments to suit his desires. Marshfield has to choose between a priest and a pervert; he chooses to be a pervert. And he never realizes his mistakes.

Sarah in *S.* loses faith in her married life because of his husband's indifferent and insensitive attitude towards her. She leaves her home and tries to find solace in religion. She goes to an ashram but soon realizes that the ashram is fake and loses her religious faith. Leaving her house makes her lose her home and husband forever because Charles decides to marry another woman Midge. She is betrayed not only by Charles but also by her best friend Midge. As a result, Sarah is left all alone.

Thus, to an extent circumstances compel the protagonists to act the way they acted. They lose faith and with it they lose a lot more.

As far as faith is concerned, it can be said that “. . . Updike has sustained an interest in basic theological issues. Ministers figure prominently in many of his novels and stories. . . .” (Dicken 69). And “. . . some of the best sermons of the twentieth century are Updike's creation, credited to his fictional preachers” (Dicken 69). Updike beautifully portrays the spiritual dilemma of his characters and eventually the loss of faith.

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Chapter 3

Faith Regained

FAITH REGAINED

“Human existence is continually a choice between good and evil, truth and falsehood. It requires a faith to live by and to die for” (Hamilton 46).

Human beings have always struggled to find their place in the Universe. People are born receptive to love, faith and hope. But gradually in life they face the less hopeful and more challenging aspects of life. It sometimes leads to existential questionings. People's faith receives heavy blows and as a result they feel separated from God. They feel disillusioned and lonely. Despite all the dialectical questions involving faith in the divine being that an actively thinking mind has, despite the ravages that faith suffers due to the experiences and vicissitudes humans go through with doubts whether faith is a invalid optimism human condition suffers from, the need to have the security of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent being is always felt by the weak mortal humans. They may realize that without faith in God, the world is an absurd place. Loss of faith creates a vacuity which needs to be filled and humans want some positivity to fill it. They soon realize how blessed they were when they had faith and how they failed to nurture their faith in the Divine. They require the presence of God in their life. They feel a need to rely upon God's grace and love. A cursory glance at the behavior of social members shows that people lose faith in God fewer times than they lose the ability to understand why He allows certain untoward things to happen. Most of us question those things. It's human nature. But there are those who vindicate divine will at any cost. The lives of the characters like Clarence, Marshfield, Sarah and Rabbit become miserable in the absence of faith and they try to find faith by one or the other means. Regaining their lost faith completely rarely happens and if it happens so, it is rarely perfect. But what matters is that they look for a means to do so.

People walk away from faith but in some strange way they wish they could get it back. People lose faith for many reasons and sometimes if they are lucky they find ways to regain lost faith. As Teresa puts it, “Religion to me is all a matter of attitude. It's saying yes to life. You have to have trust that there's a purpose, or you'll sink” (Updike *Terrorist* 89).

"A great deal of attention has been devoted to a theological interpretation of Updike's writing, based on Christian categories. By his own reckoning, Updike has a deep and long-term interest in the basic theological issues" (Dicken 69).

The common theme behind Updike's writing is the profound religious searching . . . a quest in which doubts fight desperately with faith These two worlds, the natural and the supernatural, are present explicitly or implied in all of Updike's work, and they are basic to an understanding of it. In his writing there is always the physical, natural world, apprehended by the body through its senses and appetites. But there is also another, supernatural world...apprehended by the soul, through faith. (Suzanne 5-6)

Through his fiction John Updike depicts " . . . that the increasing domination of the physical world in our lives, our focus on the satisfaction of the body, its comfort, health, sensual pleasure, and longevity, all these have shifted our attention from those spiritual ideals with which religion is concerned" (Suzanne 17). He has delineated characters that are caught up in the glamour of the world around them due to which they sometime lose their faith but at the same time there are characters that abandon everything for the pursuit of spiritual satisfaction and also achieve their lost faith.

Updike would never agree that "God is dead." Our very search for Him implies His presence. But we live at a time when there is little faith and much doubts Updike, more than any other contemporary American author, traces again and again the difficulty, almost the impossibility, of maintaining these "ancient assertions of Christianity" today. At the same time he repeatedly asserts the desperate need, the intense and irrepressible hope for religious faith. (Suzanne 7).

The characters need faith like ordinary humans do, so they always think about divine existence, when they lose their lives go awry. It is natural for an ordinary mortal to find a divine support at the level of belief, so that one feels secure and steady in this uncertain world. And thus, regaining faith is important.

In the Beauty of the Lilies is a story that begins from a loss of faith and ends at resurgence of faith. The novel is basically about America's need for faith. After Clarence's death, time passes and children of Clarence Wilmot are seen as grown-ups. The story focuses on Clarence's youngest son Teddy. He works as a postal carrier. Teddy marries Emily, a Methodist girl with a deformed foot. Being in the Church, after a long gap, makes Teddy feel strange. Teddy thinks at the time of his marriage, "It was strange, to be again in a church -- its spiky varnished wood-work, its warm haunted smell of flowers and wax and coal-gas and dust" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 206). Once Teddy tells Emily, "My poor dad wanted to believe and needed to believe and God just stayed silent" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 201). So for Teddy the fault lies not completely with Clarence. "Ted rejects God because God did not aid his father's crisis" (Bellis 219). There is human yearning for God's direct intervention. Teddy wants that God somehow should have restored Clarence's faith because God can do everything. And because God did not help Clarence so Clarence was ruined. For Teddy if it was Clarence's failure to believe, it was also a Divine failure to guide his creature. In other words, all this happened with Clarence because it was decided by God, it was God's will. It was predestined.

The story moves further and the spotlight shifts on Teddy's and Emily's daughter. The central figure is a film star. "Essie Wilmot, becomes a film star, Alma DeMott, instinctively feeling that she completes her grandfather's religious work" (Bellis 219). She tries to make up for the terrible setback when Clarence lost his faith. Essie is not a non-believer. She has faith which she adapts to her own needs. "She had trouble understanding how people could doubt God's existence" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 354). Essie is sure about God's presence and believes,

God was in the clouds and had sent Jesus to earth to make Christmas and Easter. The fact that Jesus came down meant that God wasn't just up there but was all around them, invisible, not like a ghost, who would be scary, but like blood in the veins that you can sometimes hear when your ear is against the pillow and that the doctor can feel when he puts his cold fat fingers smelling of antiseptic on your wrist. (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 233)

Essie likes rain which to her is God's attempt to touch His creatures. "It always makes her excited when it rained, as if God was touching her somehow"

(Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 264). Essie's aim in life is to become a film star. The gaudy lures and ashy chimera of movies enamor Essie. "She realized she just loved the movies and hated anything that was hurting them the way television was. It seems cheap and ugly, she said. It's like reality, only it's in a box and has commercials" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 322). This corresponds to her dislike for reality. She is fond of movies which in other words can be referred to as illusion which is better and less sordid than reality or television. Her criticism of television is due to her abhorrence of the commercial breaks which are symptomatic of the bourgeois culture. The trouble and the dejection for America, is because the religious impetus has become distorted, belittled. In fact transcendental drive cannot be satisfied but can rather be forgotten and replaced by images on TV sets and in movies. It can be concluded that:

Updike is making an argument about what the middle class in America has done to religion, the Puritan heritage that once spoke of a God powerful enough to maintain our attention, soothe our fears, and humble our egos. [. . .] Religion inevitably offers more than it can deliver, and people can transform religion into various dreams of their own making. What persists is our freedom to make honest and difficult decisions, to turn away from flaccid forms of religious belief and to salvage what is left of the religious shambles we have made. (Webb 159)

The novel "*In the Beauty of the Lilies* is certainly Updike's most vigorous exploration of everything related to movies, and Alma's dedication to the rectangular screen posits her intuition that she can supply a new spiritual leadership against her grandfather's loss of faith" (Bellis 174). In other words, ". . . Wilmot's faith is reborn in his granddaughter Essie. . . ." (Bellis 220). Essie's success is God's way of making things right for the family after Clarence's fall.

THE LARGE ISSUE (sic) of personal moral responsibility and guilt is of great interest to . . . John Updike, featuring centrally in practically everything [he has] written. It is integral to the themes . . . ethnic identity and family interactions – but it finds expression in another area of shared emphasis as well; love and marriage. [He is] concerned with human sexuality and its attendant complexities, specifically as

manifested in romantic relationships . . . Updike's lovers seem always to be stymied by a fundamental conflict involving the demands of the self versus one's obligations to others, and are frequently beset by feelings of inadequacy and guilt because of their failure to understand or balance this basic opposition. (Searles 53)

This conflict is clearly depicted and very well brought out in case of Rabbit in Updike's novel *Rabbit Run*.

Thus Updike sees man as a dichotomous creature, split between his physical desires on the one hand and his spiritual yearnings on the other. In Updike's fiction the protagonist's spirit cries out for expression. But because faith is so difficult in a contemporary world that is indifferent to spiritual values, the protagonist often loses his vision and devotes himself to the natural rather than the supernatural, the carnal rather than the spiritual. (Suzanne 6)

Rabbit Run examines a character named Rabbit Angstrom who is seen by people as irresponsible and non-religious. The story shows the prevailing confusion, meaninglessness, uncertainty and spiritual poverty in American society or in any contemporary society and the protagonist's spiritual quest: a search for meaning in such a society. Rabbit loses faith in his marriage and claims that he does not believe in God but eventually he regains his faith. *Rabbit Run* talks about ". . . the agony of being religious in an irreligious world which thinks itself to be religious" (Lawson 232). It exposes the hypocrisy of the world. The people in the *Rabbit Run* are shown to be religious, churchgoers, ethical people but when rabbit decides to follow his heart, his way of living his life then he is blamed by most of them. Kruppenbach, a pastor, who is supposed to bring people on the correct track, refuses to help Rabbit in reuniting with his wife Janice. Eccles, another minister, tries to reunite Rabbit with his wife but his own wife Lucy is not happy with Eccles and Eccles preaches Rabbit the sacredness of marriage.

When Rabbit lives with Ruth "he stares at the horizontal strip of stained-glass church window" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 76) which depicts there is still some faith left in him which makes him look at church. Rabbit who feels the absence of God in the matter of his little daughter's death now tries to look for some Divine sign, God's

presence and hope in the Church: "It is like Rabbit to notice a church even at this moment, for he sincerely believes that he is a Christian. In the very first pages of the novel, when a television performer mentions God, there is a profound effect upon Rabbit. . . . As a religious person Rabbit, though there is no evidence that he has ever frequently attended one, nevertheless locates the sacred in the church edifice" (Lawson 237). "The idea of making it while the churches are full excites him" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Seeing people going to church makes him happy. He prays silently;

The thought of these people having the bold idea of leaving their homes to come here and pray pleases and reassures Rabbit, and moves him to close his own eyes and bow his head with a movement so tiny that Ruth won't notice. Help me, Christ. *Forgive me*. Take me down the way. Bless Ruth, Janice, Nelson, my mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Springer, and the unborn baby. Forgive Tothero and all the others. Amen. (Updike *Rabbit Run* 78)

On the other hand, Ruth is a non-believer. Harry asks her, "You don't believe anything?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). She replies, "No. You mean you do?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Harry says, "Well, yeah. I think so" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). She asks, "Well, if you do what are you doing here?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Harry asks, "Doesn't it ever, at least for a second, seem obvious to you?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Ruth says, "God, you mean? No. It seems obvious just the other way. All the time" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Harry says, "Well now if God doesn't exist, why does anything?" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Ruth replies, "Why? There's no why to it. Things just are" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). May be unintentionally and unknowingly, Harry tries to persuade her to believe. Ruth adds, "She is really a little sore. His believing in God grates against her" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 79). Ruth is uncomfortable with the fact that Harry Angstrom does have faith.

Minister Eccles tries to bring Harry back home. "But because his beliefs are only a moralistic version of convention, he lacks the power to convert Rabbit's fervent soul. Instead, Eccles feels drawn to Rabbit's beliefs, which, though animal, soar higher than his own" (Samuels 39). It would not be wrong to say that "Mystical in his worship of the natural universe, Rabbit's faith is still more real than that of Eccles" (Samuels 39).

On being invited by Eccles to his church, Harry does not refuse. "Harry is happy to go to Eccles' church. Not merely out of uneasy affection for Eccles, though there's that; but because he considers himself happy, lucky, blessed, forgiven, and wants to give thanks. "His feeling that there is an unseen world is instinctive, and more of his actions than anyone suspects constitute transactions with it" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 201). On his way to the church, he finds many people.

He hates all the people on the street in dirty everyday clothes, advertising their belief that the world arches over a pit, that death is final, that the wandering thread of his feelings leads nowhere. Correspondingly he loves the ones dressed for church: the pressed business suits of portly men give substance and respectability to his furtive sensations of the invisible, the flowers in the hats of their wives seem to begin to make it visible; and their daughters are themselves whole flowers, their bodies each a single flower, petaled in gauze and frills, a bloom of faith, so that even the plainest walk in Rabbit's eyes glowing with beauty, the beauty of belief. (Updike *Rabbit Run* 201-202)

He dislikes those who are not well dressed and likes the ones who are properly dressed for the church service.

As far as novel's other pastor Reverend Kruppenbach is concerned he "espouses the same sort of unquestioning faith that Rabbit unknowingly embodies, but also fails to appreciate Rabbit's spiritual component" (Searles 24).

"In their failure to assist Rabbit the two ministers [Eccles and Kruppenbach] personify the contemporary church's generalized failure" (Searles 24).

Rabbit who previously held God responsible for his daughter Rebecca's death, now with the retrieved faith believes that Rebecca would go to Paradise. On the funeral of the baby ". . . he is sure his girl has ascended to Heaven" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 252). This reflects his faith, faith in something which cannot be seen but his heart believes that it is so.

Harry does have faith in the unseen as he says, "I don't know all this about theology, but I'll tell you, I *do* feel, I guess, that somewhere behind all this . . . there's something that wants me to find it" (Updike *Rabbit Run* 110). ". . . Rabbit has

religious faith, but he struggles to find the link between belief and moral action" (Bellis 376).

"Rabbit's attachment to the world, especially through sex, is a confirmation of his own concrete existence and his sense that there is "something beyond that can be reached." Updike insists that this is no paradox, for "religion and sex are traditionally linked in the United States" . . . though the problem for modern Americans is the clash between modern sexual mores and biblical law" (Bellis 377).

Throughout the novel, "Rabbit faces a spiritual dilemma. In the novel's penultimate paragraph he articulates the attitude toward life and virtue upon which he has acted throughout the book" (Schopen 531) when he says, "Goodness lies inside, there is nothing outside. . ." (Updike *Rabbit Run* 264). In other words, ". . . he is captive of his own embodiment, and that is all there is. . ." (Lawson 246). This is his realization that what he was searching for till now in the outside world, actually lies within him. "Updike's characters typically look within themselves rather than to the church, the Bible or a minister for personal truth" (Bellis 376).

Rabbit lacks the will, in other words, to become a knight of faith that Kruppenbach had defined as the truly religious person. This is not to say that rabbit is not religious; enough of his religious suffering is present in the novel to indicate that he is much more deeply concerned with the transempirical plane of existence than most of his fellow Americans. But Rabbit will not hear of a religion where acknowledgement of sin and the necessity of a Redeemer become apparent; he wants a religion in which all his decisions will be made for him by a Benevolent Dictator. (Lawson 244)

Dean Doner points out "Rabbit is the only major character in the novel who believes in God. Even Rabbit's sinning has touches of inverse piety" (Yates 472). In fact, "Rabbit has been judged by some interpreters of Updike to be a saint indeed, a hero of the spirit challenging all adjustments to bourgeois society that bind the self to external standards at variance with the integrity of its inward vision" (Hamilton 142).

It can be said that ". . . Rabbit Angstrom, is the only character whose religious sense is in fact spiritual and not simply an adjunct of his existence in a nominally

Christian society; yet he is at once better and worse, more and less moral, than the other characters. His faith in God is only that: it concerns no one other than himself and God, and has no influence on his human relationships" (Schopen 530).

In *Rabbit Run*, Rabbit acquires ". . . a vitally active, pitting his nearly transcendentalist faith in self-reliance, the oversoul, and individual primacy against the leveling influences of societal norms and conventions" (Searles 69). ". . . Harry . . . literally takes flight. He does so . . . to assert the primacy of individual. The aspect of Harry's running that emerges most plainly is its potential for affording spiritual liberation" (Searles 70).

In an ironic inversion of the traditional Christian conception of a body-soul dichotomy, Updike affirms the spiritual through the physical. Harry's quest for higher meaning . . . is channeled mostly through physical avenues; sports, sexuality, and Harry's highly developed sensory acuity. . . . Yet for all his earthliness, Harry's motivations are essentially religious. . . . Although Harry is by no means knowledgeable in formal theology, he possesses an intrinsic awareness of the possibility of transcendence. This intuitive spirituality sets Harry apart and renders his seemingly irresponsible behavior meaningful. (Searles 70)

Rabbit gets ambivalent response from readers as well as from other characters like Eccles because the admiration for his spiritual search clashes with the disapproval of his flight.

For one thing, Harry is unable to conceptualize his faith — or to verbalize it — except in the most rudimentary terms. Moreover, he is disturbedly aware . . . that the nature and intensity of his belief are somehow at variance with the popular consensus. In his own way Harry is curiously innocent. . . . Unlike the majority, Harry is never disillusioned, and clings to his own convictions tenaciously. Harry steadfastly withstands what he feels to be the corrupting influence of popular opinion, which seems to him to negate the transcendent. (Searles 71)

As David Galloway stresses;

His absolute devotion to a quest for meaning dictates his absolute aloneness in a society which knows nothing of meaning . . . *Rabbit Run* emphasizes that man is victimized by life itself, and it remains for him to seek salvation alone. . . . Heroes like Rabbit reject formal Christianity because it is not religious enough. What they seek is . . . some transcendent inner vision of truth. . . . Rabbit remains true to a standard of good by which he attempts to live, and the intensity of his loyalty to this standard can only be described as "religious." (36)

Harry's imperfect search for meaning says more about faith than the great and established religious traditions can because personal quest is a creative act based on innate human yearnings.

Rabbit Redux deals with theme of broken marriage and this happens when faith is lost in the institution of marriage. But in the climax this lost faith is regained and thus the marriage is saved. The novel ". . . begins with Rabbit's disenchantment with his soulless, mundane life" (Neary 103). Rabbit lacks that spiritual thirst which was present throughout the *Rabbit Run*. Rabbit has dedicated himself solely to the family and his country. His prayers have become sporadic and due to his emotional void he has become more of a passive character unlike the active protagonist of *Rabbit Run*. In fact, it would not be wrong to say that his spiritual quest has been replaced by his patriotic faith. "In *Rabbit Redux*, Updike transforms America itself into a direct analogue for his Wholly Other God. He also establishes Rabbit as an exemplar of an America that the sixties have begun to eradicate—that is, a white, middle-class America built on such values as hard work, manifest destiny, and trust in the liberal working-class policies of Roosevelt's Democratic party" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 83). "In fact, God and America become conflated in Rabbit's inner theology" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 83). "And America's actions on the world stage have for Rabbit the same lofty, Barthian otherness and infallibility as the actions of Updike's own remote, Wholly Other God" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 83-84). "Whereas in *Rabbit, Run* Harry becomes, via his faith, a Christ figure, in *Rabbit Redux* he becomes America's own begotten son, the tiller of

the garden and the defender of faith" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 84).

"For whereas the sixties make Rabbit feel cumbersome and out of place, they make her feel absolutely alive" (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 90). Rabbit's wife Janice does not spend much time at home and then starts living with Charlie Stavros. "Cut off from the earthly predictability of marriage, Rabbit is about to be swallowed up by the most chaotic elements of the anarchic 1960s: his home, and his consciousness, are invaded by a female flower child, a militant young black, and radical politics. . . ." (Neary 104).

"Jill, the flower child . . . is the antithesis of the lazily bourgeois Rabbit . . . she is directionless and hedonistic—but she also brings into Rabbit's house a kind of asceticism . . . and even an honest if chemical-tinged religious consciousness that have lately been lacking" (Neary 104-105). Jill as well as Skeeter arrange for nightly discussions on topics such as Vietnam, American history, racism, corruption etc. With Nelson, Jill talks about ". . . God, beauty, meaning" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 142). In a conversation with Nelson she tells him, "The world is what God made and it doesn't stink of money, it's never tired, too much or too little, it's always exactly full . . . our egos make us deaf. Our egos make us blind. Whenever we think about ourselves, it's like putting a piece of dirt in our eye" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 143). She says, "There's that thing in the Bible" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 143). She adds,

That's what He meant. Without our egos the universe would be absolutely clean, all the animals and rocks and spiders and moon-rocks and stars and grains of sand absolutely doing their thing, unself-consciously. The only consciousness would be God's. Think of it, Nelson, like this: matter is the mirror of spirit. But it's three-dimensional, like an enormous room, a ballroom. And inside it are these tiny *other* mirrors tilted this way and that and throwing the light back the wrong way. Because to the big face looking in, these little mirrors are just dark spots, where He can't see Himself. (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 143)

Rabbit asks, "Why doesn't He just do away with the spots then? I take it the spots are us" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 143). She answers, "I'm not sure He's noticed us

yet. The cosmos is so large and our portion of it so small. So small and recent" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 143-144).

"And Skeeter who moves in with Rabbit, Nelson and Jill, is cruel and psychotic, but he reminds Rabbit that the world, especially that of religion and sex, can have a transcendent wonder" (Neary 105).

In Skeeter, "Updike provides one of the finest black characters in American fiction" (Bellis 8). He is "the self-proclaimed Black Messiah, whose holy war would erase the evils of white culture" (Bellis 414). Skeeter exclaims, "I'm the real Jesus. I am *the* black Jesus, right? There is none other, no. . . . Worship me" (Updike *Rabbit Redux* 187). "Updike has said that the encounter of Harry "Rabbit" Angstrom and Skeeter has a "religious meaning" and that if Skeeter proclaims himself Jesus, he ought to be taken seriously" (Bellis 8).

"It is Jill and Skeeter who allow Rabbit to take another, absolutely necessary pilgrimage up the mountain of transcendence; it is because Rabbit has stopped making such pilgrimages. . . . Updike once again affirms the Kierkegaardian idea that real faith is not a permanent rejection of the ordinary" (Neary 105).

Initially Janice lives happily with Charlie Stavros but gradually circumstances change and she chooses her husband, her son and her family over Charlie and comes back home. Janice's affair with Charlie founders and Rabbit resettles back into marriage ". . . with his imperfect but likeable wife . . ." (Neary 105).

"Harry emerges from his own faithlessness in *Rabbit Redux* . . . through a combination of ecstatic forms. . . . Skeeter, an insane demonic, revives Rabbit's faith in God through his focus on the sexual, the political, and his own self-elevation in asserting that he is the Black Jesus" (Pasewark 7).

"Updike uses specific historical facts — the moon shots, the sexual revolution, the drug explosion, black militancy, and the emergence of women's self-determination—both to comment on the state of nation and to provide a context for Harry's regeneration" (Searles 25).

"Religious allusions abound, as Skeeter becomes an almost Yeatsian embodiment of the apocalyptic "second coming." And therein lies the central paradox of the novel's treatment of Christianity. Updike seems to imply that America has so

lost side of traditional Christian virtue that only through the agency of evil can Harry hope to recapture his lost spirituality” (Searles 26).

“The novel is aptly titled, then, because to a large extent it chronicles Harry’s revivification. Through . . . embroilment with a . . . teenaged runaway and a volatile black militant, Harry experiences spiritual rebirth, mends his recently broken marriage, and achieves a level of self-knowledge” (Searles 25).

A Month of Sundays exhibits a strong concern about theology especially about the fallen state of clergy. It is also about ethics and protocol and focuses on Tom Marshfield’s inadequacy as a minister. “Updike’s portraits of ministers generally emphasize their inadequacy” (Bellis 275). It depicts how a useless minister, a deeply flawed personality, is sent for recuperation and how he regains his faith. The sanatorium where he is sent is omega shaped. Omega being the last letter of Greek alphabet signifies the end of all things done till now and then rebeginning.

In the simplest terms Marshfield, like Rabbit, is caught between biology and society, religion and morality, yet whereas Rabbit rushes after solutions based purely on intuition and instinct, Marshfield analyzes his dilemma with the full force of his verbal adeptness, his theological training, and his gift for playful ambiguity. (Boswell “Updike, religion, and the novel of moral debate” 52)

Moreover, Marshfield doesn’t have “. . . a problem with belief. Rather, he struggles with the issue of harmonizing the needs of the soul with the desires of the body as evidenced in [his] attempts to balance faith with adultery” (Coates 147). The novel describes how Marshfield undergoes transformation with the help of the therapy which includes daily entries.

. . . Reverend Thomas Marshfield is sent to a retreat in Arizona, where he must record his daily reflections on his sexual misconduct in order to become a useful minister again. At first he mocks this penance by writing entries that are blasphemous and pornographic and self-consciously comment on his own writing style and typing errors. He amuses himself by re-creating erotic scenes, but admits that they may be fantasies. Gradually the

spiritual dissatisfaction and erotic need that led to his adulteries are brought under control through his recovery of the past and his meditations upon it in the journal. Yet Marshfield's apparent seduction of the motel manager Ms. Prynne suggests that his erotic delinquencies are not yet mastered, leading to questions of Marshfield's sincerity concerning his recovery of faith. Some argue, however, that the seduction proves the power of the word, and thus the power of his reunification of spirit, since his diary entries mirror the spiritual changes he has undergone. (Bellis 265)

Throughout the book he behaves like a pervert and shows no sign of repentance but towards the end of his stay when he reads his diary entries, as a judgment on himself he writes;

A man publicly pledged to goodness and fidelity scorns his wife, betrays one mistress, is ompotent with another, exploits the trust and unhappiness of some who come to him for guidance, regards his father and his sons as menacing foreign objects, and through it all evinces no distinct guilt but rather a sort of scrabbling restiveness, a sense of events as a field of rubble in which he is empowered to search for some mysterious treasure. (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 202)

This suggests that his lost faith in God, in religion, in goodness, in virtue, in righteousness is restored and he will start behaving if not like a priest, at least like a virtuous human being. This hope of revivification is hinted upon by Marshfield in one of his sermons also in which he explains, "To those who find no faith within themselves, I would say no seed is so dry it does not hold the code of life within it. . . ." (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 106). Then he also says, "I've been . . . faithful to my vows of obedience, full of the right camp spirit, willing to learn, anxious under all my impudence to return to the world as a good exemplar if not good *exemplum*" (Updike *A Month of Sundays* 223). His diary entries especially his sermons lead him from spiritual fragmentation to spiritual wholeness.

S. is about spiritual quest and spiritual rebirth of a woman named Sarah Worth. In *S.* Updike depicts "American religion and its decay since Puritan New

England. . . .” (Coates 169). Sarah turns towards eastern philosophy for regaining her faith. “. . . failure of American Protestantism turns Sarah in her spiritual search to the East . . . and this Eastern philosophy becomes the source of her spiritual awakening” (Coates 170). Charles indifferent attitude acts as a catalyst for Sarah’s journey. “Leaving me alone so much amid our piled-up treasures, you gave me time to sense that my life was an illusion, *maya*” (Updike S. 8). Her spiritual search also includes search for freedom, identity and most importantly love, which she doesn’t get from her husband Charles. “Her life with Charles, apparently stymied by his philandering . . . and only overcome when she has seduced the Arhat” (Bellis 6). It is this need for importance, care and need to be loved that makes her renounce her home. She writes, “I’m making my leap into a new life” (Updike S. 23). Thus, she abandons all the encumbrances and goes to the ashram which offers hope although false hopes to regain love, freedom, identity and lost faith in religion. “. . . in order to find inner peace . . . she rejected her much-loved upper-class life and pursued transcendence” (Bellis 492). But her giving up her home also takes away her essence of life. “By striving to strip away all illusion from her life, Sarah is shedding the very essence of what makes life worth living, namely the dreams and illusions that lead to love and human interconnection” (Schiff *Updike Version: Rewriting Scarlet Letter* 120).

“Sarah represents the average American who has come to understand faith as belief in something within the self, or an acknowledgment of Transcendence that is vainly sought within the self” (Coates 171). In the portrait of Sarah, “. . . Updike is satirizing much of contemporary America’s spiritual search, for the shallow belief in a transcendent reality individuals mistakenly think they can find within” (Coates 175). “. . . Sarah is used as a touchstone, exposing the hypocrisy of her community. . . .” (Bellis 492). Sarah Worth and for that matter even Tom Marshfield “. . . exemplify that, to varying degree at least, Americans can embrace faith and accept their bodies at the same time. . . . These . . . characters tainted with numerous faults and harmful actions, even sexually destructive ones, approach life with the premise that there is something transcendent and worth believing. . . .” (Coates 176). The novel is a comment on “. . . the ridiculous paths we choose when we become our own gods” (Coates 172). Updike demonstrates the fact that “Without Kierkegaard’s “majesty of God” and Barth’s “*Totaliter Aliter*” absurdity results” (Coates 172). In other words,

““there is no help from within — without the supernatural the natural is a pit of horror . . . and that faith is a leap out of total despair” (Howard 14). In case of *S.* we find;

Sarah struggles with belief and love, so she makes the confused choice to follow a “religious leader,” a charlatan, who fails her in both respects, as spiritual guide and lover. She believes, but the focus of her belief is . . . misplaced. Unlike Rabbit Angstrom . . . or Marshfield . . . Sarah has a double flaw in her spiritual quest: She believes she can find . . . salvation by looking within herself, and she acts out of revenge and anger, though she deceives herself by calling love her motive. Yet Sarah makes progress . . . because she does attempt to unite body and soul, to gain spiritual rebirth. . . . (Coates 173)

In the ashram Sarah comes across different men and in pursuing her quest knowingly or unknowingly becomes promiscuous.

According to Updike, sex is the closest to a religious experience that the physical world provides, so the protagonist often searches for spiritual satisfaction in sexual encounters. He seeks the ideal lover who will provide for him the transcendent experience. But Updike is always aware that sex is, finally, a natural rather than a supernatural experience. The protagonist’s search for spiritual satisfaction becomes futile and promiscuous, often resulting in his recognition of this futility . . . (Suzanne 6)

This is exactly what happens with Sarah Worth in the ashram when she moves from Vikshipta to Alinga and then to Arhat. Sarah goes out in search of spirituality. But when confronted with reality she finds that instead of becoming a spiritual being she has become promiscuous. She also discovers that Arhat cadges for money. As a result, she leaves the place but despite being cheated she has learned a lot and has fulfilled the prerequisite for rebeginning. For instance, when she meets Arhat and becomes one of the most important disciples of Arhat, she feels rejoiced and although temporarily but she does get the satisfaction of regaining lost identity and love. In one of her missives, she writes, “Arhat’s message was simply love and freedom and furthermore he was making the desert bloom” (Updike *S.* 30). The people in the

ashram are asked to dress up in particular shades. She writes, "The color code asks we dress in the shades of the sunset, symbolizing the end of mundane concerns. . . ." (Updike *S.* 27). During her stay at the ashram, through the meditation sessions, Arhat's speeches and the activities she does feel revival of her lost religious faith. She writes about her experience, "This had to be the place I was meant to bring my life to. My poor bedraggled silly life, to be recycled. Inside I just felt this glorious relief" (Updike *S.* 30). She feels her faith revitalized. She writes, ". . . whole matter of whether God exists or not, which I always thought rather boring, is just plain transcended, it seems so obvious that something exists, something incredibly and tirelessly good" (Updike *S.* 35). She adds, "I just feel terribly *full*. I feel . . . like I'm carved out of one big piece of crystal and exactly fitted into a mold of the same crystal" (Updike *S.* 35). She is glad to be here. She mentions, "My happiness is deeper than I ever felt happiness before. It's as if there is a level the sun has never reached before. *He* makes it possible, the Arhat, he *permits* it – his voice, his glow" (Updike *S.* 36). Sarah abdicates the encumbrances and here she feels she could start afresh. She writes, "How can I describe to you how I feel here/ Tender and open as if I've shed an old skin" (Updike *S.* 41). She explains the purpose of the people in the ashram. She writes, ". . . what we are trying to do here isn't escape the world but revolutionize it" (Updike *S.* 42). She writes, "The Arhat preaches peace and serenity in the world whose economy is based on war and agitation" (Updike *S.* 81). She writes, "I have recently learned that all material world is a jail" (Updike *S.* 90). She clarifies, "This is a spiritual place but also a hard-working place" (Updike *S.* 96). She explains to her daughter Pearl, "Your mother is seeking truth, beauty, and freedom, and *finding* it . . ." (Updike *S.* 133). She adds, "You speak of my renewal here as an "ego trip" when in fact the *flight from ego* is what I have undertaken . . ." (Updike *S.* 133).

Even when she leaves the ashram she has already become aware of her potential and talent which hitherto been unexplored. "After the Arhat is unmasked as a fraud, she still continues her spiritual quest. . . ." (Bellis 492). It can ergo be inferred that Sarah remains resourceful even at the end. "Updike is demonstrating through Sarah . . . the failure of the American pilgrim's quest but also the success, for Sarah does accomplish an independence and openness to new modes of thought which offer her a new view of her potential. Most poignantly, Sarah learns that salvation is not achieved through renunciation" (Coates 170-171).

In *A Month of Sundays* and S. Updike “. . . has ventured to close the dichotomy of body and soul” (Coates 147). In both the novels, *S.* and *A Month of Sundays*, the protagonists have been characterized as “. . . individuals struggling within themselves and against their communities in an effort to shake off the past and reinvent on the world” (Schiff *Updike's Version Rewriting Scarlet Letter* 11).

Rabbit is Rich takes up the life of middle-aged Harry Rabbit Angstrom. Harry thinks, “Middle age is a wonderful country, all the things you thought would never happen are happening. When he was fifteen, forty-six would have seemed the end of the rainbow, he'd never get there. . . .” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 208). Harry has found success in *Rabbit is Rich*. Harry and his reconciled wife Janice live comfortably. Harry is now the owner of the Springer Motors. Rabbit is happy, affluent, secure, and smug and has a respectable position in this novel. “For the first time since childhood Rabbit is happy, simply, to be alive” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 7). There is almost no anguish in the story. He no longer feels ensnared and the need to escape. He is rich and complacent still there are few problems which makes his life complicated. He has to deal with the carelessness, indecision and irresponsibility of his son Nelson, who is a student at Kent State University. Harry tells Nelson, “I hate to be the one telling you this, Nelson, but you're a disaster” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 152). Harry tells Thelma, “He doesn't seem to want to go back to college so maybe he's flunked out and never told us” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 155). Nelson is portrayed in negative terms. He is almost shown as Rabbit's enemy. Harry says to Janice, “It's great to have an enemy. Sharpens your senses” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 111). He is awful, aimless and unsympathetic character. Rabbit says, “. . . I'd like to see him get some kind of grip on the world. He's not going to get it hanging around here all summer” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 37). He is in sharp contrast to Rabbit. Nelson says, “I am not you” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 187). He doesn't like his father at all. Nelson's friend Melanie tries to convince him that his father is a good person but he disagrees. She asks, “You loved your granddad, didn't you Nelson?” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 119). To which he replies, “He liked *me*. . . . He wasn't always criticizing me because I wasn't some great shakes athlete and ten feet tall” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 119). “I've never heard your father criticize you,” she says, “except when you cracked up his car” (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 119). She adds, “You need your father. We all need fathers. At least yours is where you can find him. He's not a bad man” (Updike. *Rabbit is Rich* 119).

Nelson insists, "He is bad, really bad. He doesn't know what's up, and he doesn't *care*, and he thinks he's so great. That's what gets me, his happiness. He is so fucking *happy*. Nelson almost sobs. You think of all the misery he's caused. My little sister dead because of him and then this Jill he let die" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 119). Melanie knows the facts and patiently and amiably says, "You mustn't forget the circumstances. Your father's not God" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 119). "You're feeling frustrated right now," Melanie tells him, "because of your situation. But your situation is not your father's fault" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 120). "It is," Nelson insists. "Everything's his fault, it's his fault I'm so fucked up, and he enjoys it. . . ." (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 120).

Not only Melanie but also his wife Pru tries to persuade him to change his opinion about his father and tries to tell him that he loves Nelson but he doesn't agree. Pru tells him, "I mean, your father's not perfect, but who is?" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 286). In another conversation with Nelson Pru frankly tells him, "You're spoiled and you're a bully, Nelson" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 302). "I was never spoiled, just the opposite. You don't know what my family did to me" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 302). Pru says, "I've heard about it a thousand times and to me it never sounded like any big deal. You expect your mother and poor old grandmother to take care of you no matter what you do. You're horrid about your father when all he wants is to love you, to have a halfway normal son" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 302). Nelson replies, "He didn't want me to work at the lot" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 302). Pru answers, "He didn't think you were ready and you weren't. You aren't" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 302). Unlike Nelson, Harry does not believe in putting allegations on people. "He doesn't blame people for many sins but he does hate uncoördination, the root of all evil as he feels it, for without coördination there can be no order, no connecting" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 42). He himself tries to explain Nelson that whatever happened was not his fault. "Look Nelson, Maybe I haven't done everything right in my life. I know I haven't. But I haven't committed the greatest sin. I haven't laid down and died" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 344). Nelson asks, "Who says that's the greatest sin?" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 344). Rabbit answers, "Everybody says it. The church, the government. It's against Nature, to give up, you've got to keep moving" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 344).

Harry seems rid of his past. He says, "The past is past . . . you got to live in the present" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 344). Once he tells Nelson, "Let go, you got to let some things go for other people to worry about. The Bible tells you that, it says it on every page. Let go; the Lord knows best" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 349). Harry has let his past go unless he meets a young girl at the lot. One day he sees a girl named Annabelle at the lot and he finds resemblance between her and Ruth and since then he is curious to know if Annabelle is Ruth and his daughter. "For three months twenty years ago Rabbit lived on Summer with a woman, Ruth Leonard. There he fathered the girl he saw today, if that was his daughter. There is no getting away; out sins, our seed, coil back" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 28). He tries to rediscover his past when he tries to meet Ruth. Harry wonders about his former lover Ruth and whether she ever gave birth to their child or not. Harry drives around looking for Ruth, whom he deserted in *Rabbit Run*. Rabbit is hopeful that Ruth must have given birth to a daughter because he had always wanted a daughter. During the course of the novel Nelson gets married to Pru and in the climax of the novel Rabbit becomes a grandfather. The baby girl quenches his longing for his own daughter Rebecca. Harry's mother-in-law Mrs. Springer informs Rabbit, "The baby came last night. A girl. . . ." (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 388). After sometime Pru ". . . deposits into his lap what he has been waiting for. Oblong, cocooned little visitor, the baby shows her profile . . ." (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 423). So, in his granddaughter he regains his dead daughter Rebecca.

Harry may not be shown as a devout believer but he is certainly not an atheist. Sometimes he thinks of God. He even believes in God. "Sometimes he prays a few words at night but a stony truce seems to prevail between himself and God" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 125). Harry loves rain. "Rain, the last proof left to him that God exists" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 111). ". . . he lies awake listening to the rain, not willing to let it go, this sound of life" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 112). "Rabbit has always liked rain. . . ." (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 187). ". . . it has been exciting for Harry to stand near a window during a rain, his face inches from the glass and dry, where a few inches away everything is wet" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 243).

But Nelson who is in no way like Rabbit does not believe in God and even admits that. "Pru and I didn't ask to be married in a church, I don't believe any of that stuff anyway" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 177). "You didn't? Harry is shocked and hurt"

(Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 177). "No Dad" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 177). He even thinks that his father is foolish in believing in God. Nelson sardonically says about his father, ". . . such a fool he really believes there is a God he is the apple of the eye of" (Updike *Rabbit is Rich* 293).

The attitude of both the father and the son is in contrast to one another. Rabbit believes in the presence of God whereas Nelson does not. In fact Nelson does not trust anything that his father believes because he holds Rabbit responsible for every mishap that occurred in his life.

Of the Farm is a story of family relationships. The relationship between the mother and the son, the husband and the wife and especially between the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law are taken into account. "For Updike's belief that ordinary relationships contain manifold complications, this book provides impressive evidence" (Samuels 21).

Joey Robinson comes home for a weekend with his new second wife Peggy and her son to take care of some chores regarding the farm and to meet his mother as his mother is old and could not properly handle the farm. Mrs. Robinson, the mother is shown to be a religious woman, a churchgoer and she is attached to her farm very much. Now as they all live under one roof, ". . . he experiences a rivalry between Mrs. Robinson and Peggy so intense as to threaten his marriage" (Samuels 22). Mrs. Robinson compares Peggy to Joey's first wife Joan and insists that Peggy is not as good as Joan. She dislikes Peggy and wants to influence Joey also. This makes Joey confused and he doesn't exactly know what to say. He feels that his happy relationship with Peggy is creaking a little because of the strain. One Sunday, Mrs. Robinson and Joey go to church. The young priest reads the verses. The first one is as follows; "*And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.*" Notice, first, that Adam's need was a "help meet" (Updike *Of the Farm* 149-150). The sermon has a profound effect on Mrs. Robinson and she realizes her mistake and tries to make amends. "A deeply religious woman, Mrs. Robinson apparently now sees that it would be a sin to try to maintain her hold on Joey. Therefore, she admits that Peggy suits him better than his first wife, Joan" (Samuels 25).

When they come back from the church, she no longer behaved with Peggy the way she used to behave with her. She says, "Thank you. . . . You've done your duty, all three of you, and you've made this old woman very happy. . . ." (Updike *Of the Farm* 172). She even says, "The next time you come . . . I'd like you to go have your pic taken for me" (Updike *Of the Farm* 173-174). Thus, at the end the shrinking faith and understanding in the relationships is restored.

"Filled with the loveliness of primal pleasures — the farm, early mornings, one's youth — it also depicts the danger of fixation upon them. Definition requires that we keep faith with our past; freedom demands that we move beyond it. Grand though she is, Mrs. Robinson must yield to Peggy, just as Joey the boy must give way to Joey the man" (Samuels 25). "But the three principal characters can only make their mutual adjustments after they have seen their situation from the individual perspectives that make it up. Subtly, naturally, *Of the Farm* performs this feat" (Samuels 26).

"Instead of the effort to recapture one's past, we have a quest for permanence that involves religion . . . love itself seems a religious obligation; sometimes, because Christianity has been polluted by institutionalism or diluted by a social gospel, love can seem the deepest expression of spiritual thirst" (Samuels 26). ". . . *Of the Farm* is about moral readjustment . . . the mother and boy need, in a way, to excuse each other. . . ." (Rhode 50). ". . . Joey and his mother achieve at least some measure of this moral readjustment. . . ." (Coates 124). There is ". . . hope that Peggy's honesty and goodness combined with Joey's slight moral readjustment with his mother at least hold forth the possibility that now Joey can make progress with Peggy, too" (Coates 124).

It can be inferred that the protagonists in the novels are in constant search of faith and irrespective of what they deem to be the reason of their loss of faith they try to regain their lost faith. Sometimes they mistakenly choose the wrong paths but they do not give up and continue their quest unless they see at least some hope of revivification. In the course of their journey they sometimes trust frauds. Sarah and Clark believe Arhat and Jesse Smith to be divine personalities despite sybaritic excesses. Libido plays a crucial role in the characters journey. Throughout their quest, religion and sex are often found to be linked to one another. "Religious persons like Tom Marshfield . . . and Arhat who represent the divine though they are sexually

quite active recur in Updike's novels" (Bellis 10). One of the reasons that give sensuality such an important place in a spiritual quest is that, "The door to eternity being ultimately undiscoverable, his characters find instead temporal doors of pleasure and self-indulgence" (Gingher 102). As is seen in case of *Rabbit Run*. "Morality in his fiction becomes more and more exclusively a system of socio-sexual ethics instead of the more direct, God-seeking morality. . . ." (Gingher 102). As is seen in case of Tom Marshfield.

"The poignant fact regarding Harry's faith is not so much that he is unable to champion it but rather that he is unable to discard it completely. He wants to have faith. . . ." (Coates 80). "He is Updike's portrayal of a nation in which faith lingers as a presence strong enough to haunt yet too weak to help significantly" (Coates 80). "The objectivity of God . . . is the only element that can sustain man's faith, love, trust and obedience, stands solidly as a marker throughout Rabbit's journey. Human rationality cannot arrive at faith and cannot serve faith's function of holding at bay the terror of nothingness" (Coates 92).

Apart from pivotal role of sex in religious journey, importance of work in one's life is also highlighted.

In Updike's fiction, work takes on an almost religious dimension . . . the Christian conception of work as a form of prayer permeates Updike's fiction. And the suggestion plainly is that America's present spiritual laxity is reflected in current attitudes toward employment. Whereas people once found purpose and direction in their work, many now view their professional obligations as barriers and impediments. The spiritual component has been negated, producing a culture in which people labor without fulfillment. (Searles 89)

This is true in case of Clarence Wilmot and also in case of Tom Marshfield. Both renounce their jobs because they find no purpose in their jobs. The only difference between the two pastors is that while the former dies without regaining his faith, the latter has hope of regaining his faith in his job. Marshfield's dilemma is that he is torn between spirituality and sensuality and as a result is sent to a sanatorium to learn the proper behavior for the clergy. His musings and entries including the four

significant sermons constitute the written record of his spiritual quest and he seems to experience a rebirth of faith.

The same idea is also echoed by Sarah in one of her missives to her mother. She writes, “. . . the work is worship for us, and when you are in the right place spiritually the more you give the more you have. It's even in the Bible but no Christian believes it anymore” (Updike *S.* 82).

In the midst of desires, responsibilities and actions, protagonists find themselves segregated, torn and on tenterhooks. The conclusion that can be derived from the discussion of the novels taken into account in this chapter is that in this materialistic and mysterious world the only solace is in the faith in the spiritual world. The characters find themselves troubled externally and especially internally till they undergo resurgence of faith. Updike through his novels makes an impassioned call for a return to faith.

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Chapter 4

In the Name of Faith

IN THE NAME OF FAITH

One of the important manifestations of much discussed clash of civilizations is terror as well as war on terror, both triggering each other making a vicious cycle. Terror, terrorist and terror attacks are some phrases which are mostly used with shock, regret, alarm, consternation as well as lips smacking sensational fondness by the mainstream media which are consumed by the public with willingness as well as hostility. The clash of civilization is primarily explained in terms of faith: faith supposedly being the foundation of civilization. The question arises that if faith really holds so much sway on people of consequence, could it not be used in any way that could bring about harmony and peace. Is faith only a destructive force? Is it only a suicidal, annihilatory, self defeatist negative force? If so many lives are sacrificed in the name of faith and so much of hostility and animosity is generated amongst people due to faith, does the world really need faith? Or is it simply dispensable?

Terrorism, though not a new phenomenon, pervades the harsh reality of the modern world, with complex and myriad factors contributing to its continued presence and rise. Among the factors contributing to it is the current Media Culture begotten by late capitalism of current world order. The lifestyle of the globalized world as desired by capitalist dream is marked by a splurge in material acquisition and heedless consumerism. Updike's *Terrorist* is not only an attempt to delve into the mind of an American boy, the result of a short marriage between an Arab man and an Irish woman, but also a critique of the hedonistic American society.

In the age of capitalism people move towards materialism and disconnection. Commenting on American lifestyle Ahmad says, "“It makes no difference which President is in. They all want Americans to be selfish and materialistic, to play their part in consumerism. But the human spirit asks for self-denial. It longs to say ‘No’ to the physical world”” (Updike *Terrorist* 70). At another place he observes, "In this country, it is not easy. There are too many paths, too many selling of many useless things. They brag of freedom, but freedom to no purpose becomes a kind of prison" (Updike *Terrorist* 145). What Ahmad says is that there are so many things present around him, so much so that they are incarcerated by the material things. It stops him from treading on the Straight path.

Other factor is the desire to establish one's identity. People who have vapid life and who feel that they have no identity get attracted to destruction. Their psychology gets gratified by destruction. Vandalism for them is an emotional outburst. Ahmad is bullied in the school as he is an Arab-American. Tylenol calls him, "Hey Arab . . ." (Updike *Terrorist* 13). He further adds, "Don't you talk to me of foolish – you so foolish nobody give you shit, Arab" (Updike *Terrorist* 13).

Poverty which is one of the evils is also one of the important determinants of insurgency and terrorism. People commit these acts of terrorism not out of hatred for but also out of their poverty-stricken conditions as the promise and lure of a better never get fulfilled. In order to combat terrorism, there is a need to combat poverty which causes a sense of deprivation. As far as Ahmad is concerned, his mother is a nurse's aide and an amateur artist with meager income which does not ensure a luxurious life. In the plethora of goods around him, a sense of deprivation settles in him. "Ahmad tasted American plenty by licking its underside. *Devils*, these many gaudy packages seemed to be, these towering racks of today's flimsy fashion, these shelves of chip-power expressed in murderous cartoons prodding the masses to buy, to consume while the world still had resources to consume, to gorge at the trough before death closed greedy mouths forever" (Updike *Terrorist* 149).

A person may also be a rebel due to his minority status as Ahmad is. As a half Irish half Arab boy brought up in America with a sense of deprivation not only due to the absence of his father but also paucity of money, bullied for his racial hybridity by Tylenol, he associates his identity with his absent father's which is that of an Arab Muslim. His attachment with his religious identity is used as a weak point by his religious teacher. Ahmad's is a case of restoration of faith as a positive force, defeating faith as a negative force working in combination with patriarchal racial and religious identity, effected with the help of some concrete appeal to his basic goodness made by his counselor Jack, his slain Arab friend Charlie who turns out to be a CIA agent under cover and the presence of naughty kids peeping out their car window and smiling at him naughtily in the climactic scene. Ahmad's self-elected religious identity gives way to his national identity as an American. Ahmad in the novel *Terrorist* thinks that his identity is related to his father's who is not there in his life. His attachment to Shaikh Rashid may be interpreted as his unconscious attempt

to find a father figure. Despite his conscious effort to stop Jack Levy assuming paternal authority or affection, Ahmad ends up accepting his influence in deciding against committing an act of terror. It was due to his religious teacher's influence Ahmad starts thinking that his identity is related to his religion. At the behest of his teacher he agrees to do the crime. Fortunately, his national identity overpowers his religious identity in the end. Ahmad accepts the fact that after all he is an American. Even if there are some aspects of American life with its senseless consumerism, greed and inanity which he does not find acceptable, he should tolerate them as a part of American lifestyle and carry on with his life.

Terrorism is a symptom of deeper psychological problems. Terrorism is not a sudden reaction. It begins with a sense of deprivation causing frustration. It may lead to inner simmering reaching a boiling point to take the form of aggression and violence. In its extreme shape this reaches the form of terrorism.

Since terrorism is explained in terms of faith, it becomes one of the concerns of this work and more so because Updike also takes up this issue in a concerted way in his novels namely *Terrorist* and *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. In the context of Updike's novels concerned with interrelatedness of terror and faith, it can be observed that faith seems to be indispensable for his characters. Faith in his novels is not only a destructive force but also a power that can rescue humanity as is evident in Clark's and Ahmad's cases. They choose to save vulnerable and simple people even at the cost of their own lives.

In the name of faith innocent people are killed and this killing in the name of faith is even justified by the anti-social elements by interpreting religion to suit their violent intentions.

Religious terrorism is a type of political violence motivated by an absolute belief that another worldly power has sanctioned — and commanded — terrorist violence for the greater glory of the faith. Acts committed in the name of the faith will be forgiven by the otherworldly power and perhaps rewarded in an afterlife. In essence, one's religious faith legitimizes violence as long as such violence is an expression of the will of one's deity. (Martin 130)

Acts of violence thus are mostly interpreted as directed by the will of God, the unseen who speaks through human tongue.

Terrorism carried out in the name of the faith has long been a feature of human affairs. The histories of people, civilizations, nations, and empires are replete with examples of extremist true believers who engage in violence to promote their belief system. Some religious terrorists are inspired by defensive motives, others seek to ensure the predominance of their faith, and others are motivated by an aggressive amalgam of these tendencies. (Martin 131)

Religious fundamentalism has become a significant force in the cultural dynamics of contemporary world and these novels seek to explore the worldview and motivations of religious fundamentalists.

This chapter makes an attempt to analyze in the context of Updike's novels how faith serves as a constructive as well as destructive force. Ahmad and Clark who reach the brink of this so called faith, prevent the killing of innocent people saving their lives. What they do requires courage and will power. Faith would have turned out to be a destructive force for them. With their rational thinking and their self-questioning, they turn it into a constructive one.

Religious extremism transcends age and faith, but young people are particularly vulnerable to extremist ideas. Many of their outbursts are carried out in the name of religion. Religious or ideological extremism if permitted to hold too much sway lead to such kind of attacks that take away lives of many innocents. The balance between faithlessness and fanatical spirituality is needed and that is also the essence of Clark's story in *In the Beauty of the Lilies* and Ahmad's story in *Terrorist*.

As far as *In the Beauty of the Lilies* is concerned Clark is a conscious thinker. He can see through the spoof that his leader Jesse is. Obsession with aggressive behavior and terrorism starts with obscured rationality. One gets engulfed in extreme views of the cult. Clark does not grope in the darkness of blind faith. He realizes the fruitlessness of religious violence. Clark's sudden revelation directs him to a new

path. "A flock of dark immaterial bubbles descended into Esau, and he knew what to do. He felt his physical body existing within that electric hyperclarity that for years had come and gone in his head." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 484). He stops before it is too late. The change in his outlook is a rebellion against the terrorist leader which leads to Jesse's retribution.

Terrorist is a novel about religious faith of a teenager who does not lose his faith, even though he is compelled to do so. Novel is about juvenile offence. For some time Ahmad is misled by his mentor and is on the verge of causing disaster but due to the subtle guidance of his counselor, his unrealized love for his mother and Charlie who is like his brother and presence of life in its jubilant form, he soon realizes that he is on the wrong track and stops himself. When Ahmad chooses life over death, forgiveness over punishment is the point where faith as a positive energy is evidenced.

Ahmad values his faith and is proud about it as he says to Joryleen, "I am a good Muslim, in a world that mocks faith" (Updike *Terrorist* 67). He has a Christian mother named Teresa. Although his father Omar was not a practicing Muslim but Ahmad is. As his mother tells, "Islam meant nothing to me And it meant not so much to his father. Omar never went to a mosque" (Updike *Terrorist* 83). So the missing faith in the parents is retrieved in Ahmad's case.

Ahmad's growing religious fervor makes him an easy prey to Rashid's indoctrination and he is programmed to carry out so called jihadist activities by his teacher Shaikh Rashid.

There is a lot of discussion on the much used and abused term jihad. HabibChehab, Ahmad's employer, has a common view about jihad as is portrayed by media and militants: that it is only about killing. He talks about the jihadists, "They wish to destroy America. That is what they say to reporters, even though they are better fed by us than ever by Taliban. They think Nine- Eleven was a great joke. It was war for them. It is jihad" (Updike *Terrorist* 146). Ahmad does not have a narrow view of jihad. He takes it as a broad term which means striving for a divine lifestyle at

an individual level. "Jihad doesn't have to mean war It means striving, along the path of God. It can mean inner struggle" (Updike *Terrorist* 146).

Ahmad is not bereft of pity. While discussing the destruction of the twin towers, Ahmad expresses pity for the ones jumping out their windows to escape fire. Charlie who works an undercover CIA agent repeats what he should do to catch potential terrorists:

"Those people worked in finance, furthering the interests of the American empire, the empire that sustains Israel and inflicts death every day on Palestinians and Chechnyans, Afghans and Iraqis. In war, pity has to be put on hold."

"Many were merely guards and waitresses."

"Serving the empire in their way."

"Ahmad you must think of it as a war. War isn't tidy. There is collateral damage."

Charlie goes on to say in order to heighten the effect "The western powers steal our oil, they take our land ---" To which Ahmad answers "They take our God".

It is interesting to note that Charlie uses the term "collateral damage" often used in the media to explain and rationalize death of innocent people in war on terror. While for Charlie it is "pride" and "a sense of themselves" which matter for all the men, for Ahmad it is God who matters most. What Charlie talks about is "a bit forced and far removed from the concrete living God who stands beside Ahmad as close as the sunshine warming the skin of his neck". Ahmad's God is his personal companion living with him round the clock a reality as concrete and sensuous as He can be. For him the hustle bustle of life around him is "*beauty*" which "*must mean something---* a hint from Allah, a foreshadow of paradise" (Updike *Terrorist* 185) the possibility that he would ever kill and cause destruction is pre-empted in the way he thinks about life around him and his close companion Allah. It is suggestive of the fact that nothing, whether it is the issue of pride or identity, that can put him on the path of destruction. Through Ahmad's character, Updike clears much confusion about God and the term

Jihad. His daily battle against lust, greed and profanity is his way of doing jihad. "There is a great deal of confusion in the West regarding the meaning of Jihad and the role it is playing in shaping the Muslim world. Indeed, it has acquired a pejorative connotation in the minds of many Westerners" (Mohammad 381).

Media has played a crucial role in presenting terrorism as single serious global threat. Media abdicates its role of objective critic. "Jihad is a part of Muslim spirituality. It is important, therefore, for Westerners to understand Jihad if they are to understand Islam and their Muslim neighbors" (Mohammad 397).

It is shown in the novel *Terrorist* how the manipulated extremist theology easily brainwashes vulnerable people, some of whom are intelligent students like Ahmad. People must be intelligent enough not to be trapped in such manipulation. In a way Updike tries to find problems about extreme views on life which lead to disaster. Ahmad's way of looking at Joryleen is author's criticism of promiscuous and anarchic ways of members of American Consumerist society.

Most of the people don't have faith nevertheless they may attend church, perform rituals and participate in religious ceremonies as Joryleen does. She sings in choir despite her lack of faith. She has optimism and sense of acceptance for all forms of life in contrast to Ahmad's narrow view. She is skeptical about Ahmad's condemnation of others' lives. What is promiscuity to Ahmad is a part of life for Joryleen. Both of them present extreme viewpoints.

The war of terrorism is very short-sighted and is a failure because it gives rise to more generations of grievance-filled victims. Faith when becomes destructive, becomes a failure. This war is a kind of backlash but people who are killed are not the ones who had done wrong. Terrorism creates collateral damage. Innocents are victims of this scourge. It has created mayhem in the world. It should be ensured that innocents are not subject to punishment for things that they did not do.

Religion should not sacrifice human logic which says human life is precious. The core teaching of every faith is ambivalent: it may lead violence and peace both depending on how the believers use it. "Comparative and historical analysis show that religious activity is morally multivalent and can lead to violence or peace. . . .

Religions are pluralistic entities and engage societies in a range of ways. . . . Thus it is important to synthesize public theological resources that foster critical judgment and social-historical analyses that promote broad understanding of the world religions” (Healey 3). Most of the adherents of faith do not use violence as a means of achieving their aims since religions can be interpreted in different ways. Defending religion Asghar Ali Engineer says, “Religion is neither fanatic nor communal. The threat to socio-economic interests from competing forces leads to political mobilization, with religion being used as a pretext” (701). The factors like socio-economic interests leading to political mobilization are discussed in *Terrorist*.

Terrorism in itself does not define a specific religious point of view, instead it defines the point of view of a group. The perpetrators of acts of terrorism can be anyone belonging to any religion.

Religious terrorism can be communal, genocidal, nihilistic, or revolutionary. It can be committed by lone wolves, clandestine cells, large dissident movements, or governments. And, depending on one’s perspective, there is often debate about whether the perpetrators should be classified as terrorists or religious freedom fighters. (Martin 131)

Terrorism depicted in *Terrorist* is genocidal. Shaikh Rashid portrays it positively whereas in reality it is not. As far as Ahmad is concerned, he has strength of faith. It can be said “The student’s faith exceeds the master’s” (Updike *Terrorist* 5). He declares, “I seek to walk the Straight Path” (Updike *Terrorist* 145). If translated in Arabic it means “*ihdenas seraatal mustaqueem*” (Efendi and Bayrak 44). Ahmad is subjected to prevailing discrimination against Muslims. As is told by his mother that after the 9/11 attack, they received many phone calls as if they are the culprits. He thinks, “*The world is difficult . . . because devils are busy in it, confusing things and making the straight crooked*” (Updike *Terrorist* 8). Ahmad realizes that the true jihad is not in killing innocents but in saving lives.

Faith has a very positive effect on Ahmad. He abstains from sexual promiscuity, believes in purity and wants to go to Paradise. He doesn’t say, “*America*

wants to take away my God" (Updike *Terrorist* 36). Instead he says, "The teachers, weak Christians and nonobservant Jews, make a show of teaching virtue and righteous self-restraint, but their shifty eyes and hollow voices betray their lack of belief. They are paid to say these things They lack true faith; they are not on the Straight Path; they are unclean" (Updike *Terrorist* 1). Ahmad feels his faith is threatened by the materialistic, hedonistic society he finds himself in.

Turning to the words of the Holy Quran as expounded to him by the donnish imam of a local mosque, Ahmad devotes himself fervently to God. Ahmad is a firm believer. Religion is his strength as well as his weakness. Strength that guides him and weakness that makes him agree on whatever is dictated to him in the name of religion. The robust faith that Ahmad has in his religion is misused by Shaikh Rashid. He makes him a kind of scapegoat. HabibChehab says, "The imam tells us you're very pious" (Updike *Terrorist* 145). Ahmad tells Charlie, "I have a God to whom I turn five times a day. My heart needs no other companion" (Updike *Terrorist* 211). "Ahmad in his fatherless years with his blithely faithless mother grows accustomed to being God's sole custodian, the one whom God is an invisible but palpable companion. God is ever with him. As it says in the ninth sura, *Ye have no patron or helper save God*. God is another person close behind him, a Siamese twin attached in every moment in prayer. God is his happiness" (Updike *Terrorist* 36). Ahmad's mother states, "He believes in the Islamic God, and in what Koran tells him" (Updike *Terrorist* 83). One day in order to understand Ahmad better, counselor Jack Levy asks Ahmad, "Your faith — it's important to you." Ahmad replies, "Yes." Jack asks, "God — Allah — is very real to you." Ahmad answers, "He is in me, and at my side" (Updike *Terrorist* 39).

When Ahmad attends a church service he feels slightly awkward and out of place.

Accustomed to worshippers squatting and kneeling on a floor, emphasizing God's height above them, Ahmad feels, even seated, dizzily, blasphemously tall. The Christian attitude of lazily sitting erect as at an entertainment suggests that God is an entertainer

who, when He ceases to entertain, can be removed from the stage,
and another act brought on. (Updike *Terrorist* 48)

For Ahmad Christian faith seems precarious as he interprets it in its form of worship. God looks so dispensable as if He can easily be dislodged. Since there is a difference in the manner of praying in Islam and in Christianity, Ahmad feels that Christian mode of worship is a kind of blasphemy because in it instead of kneeling down people sit erect. He thinks that it lacks humility which should be a part of faith; humility which can make one wise, peace loving and self abnegating.

Shaikh Rashid misleads him in the guise of ministering him. He says, "... you have expressed a willingness to die for jihad" (Updike *Terrorist* 230). Ahmad replies, "I will die ... if it is the will of God" (Updike *Terrorist* 230). Ahmad's deep Islamic faith and disaffection with modern life make him susceptible to Shaikh Rashid's ideas.

The zeal that is the essence of fanaticism sometimes tends to become dangerous. It may cause severe problems for mankind. Some people mistake it to be a part of religion.

Fanatics often set themselves up as saints and offer spiritual and monetary rewards and the possibility of a better life. Shaikh Rashid takes undue advantage of Ahmad's longing for Heaven. To persuade him he says, "Your translation to Paradise would be instant. . . . Your family — your mother — would receive compensation. . . ." (Updike *Terrorist* 232). Shaikh Rashid insists, "You will not be there to experience it. You will already be in Jannah, in Paradise, at that instant, confronting the delighted face of God. He will greet you as His son. . . . There are many others eager for a glorious name and the assurance of eternal bliss. The jihad is overwhelmed by volunteers, even in this homeland of evil and irreligion" (Updike *Terrorist* 233). In the name of religion and for the sake of pleasing God, he asks Ahmad to massacre people by means of explosives. Ahmad is a young and innocent and trusts his teacher because in him Ahmad finds a father figure. Initially he agrees to do the task. Soon Ahmad understands that his religion cannot justify killing of innocent people. Ahmad feels, "*The only guidance...is the guidance of Allah*" (Updike *Terrorist* 15). Ahmad

realizes, "God does not want to destroy: it was He who made the world" (Updike *Terrorist* 301). It is his belief in the divine being as a constructive force that stops him from acts of destruction. Ahmad says to himself, "This is the will of the Beneficent, the Merciful, *ar-Rahman* and *ar-Rahim*, the Living, the Patient, then Generous, the Perfect, the Light, the Guide. He does not want us to desecrate His creation by willing death. He wills life" (Updike *Terrorist* 302). Updike cites the Holy Quran in the novel with the proper translations of Arabic verses which reflects the painstaking research on part of the writer involved in the writing of the work. The most highlighted virtues of God in Islamic religious scriptures are that He is the Beneficent, the Merciful, the Living, the Patient, the Generous, the Perfect, the Light, and the Guide. God is the ideal humans should follow.

To discuss in detail the reasons why Ahmad desist from terrorism, it can be said that there are multiple factors involved. He himself was never sure of his decision to obey Shaikh Rashid. While driving the loaded truck, he meets his counselor Jack Levy who has been tipped by his wife's sister. Jack somehow manages to accompany Ahmad and on the way tries to persuade him not to go ahead. It was not easy for him to convince Ahmad who is under the strong influence of Shaikh Rashid. Ahmad listens to his counselor's advice and consciously or unconsciously realizes the positivity and the truth behind whatever Jack says. Secondly, on his way Ahmad sees kids in the vehicle before him. The kids were peeping from the vehicle, an image which generates positive energy in him at a subconscious level. His love for his mother is also appealed to him. Ahmad realizes that God wills life and no human being is entitled to put an end to it. An amalgamation of these mixed factors and feelings guides Ahmad not to commit merciless mass murder. As a result, he does not commit the act or rather a heinous crime. Ahmad realizes that God is merciful and God has created life so he as a follower of God has no right to kill that is created by God. This act of Ahmad also shows his acceptance of American society as it is.

What Shaikh Rashid does is the misuse of not only a student's faith on a teacher but also the religion and the Holy Book which he is supposed to preach. Shaikh Rashid justifies dreadful act of killing by giving it the name of jihad and by luring his pupil in the name of worldly and otherworldly rewards. He construes the

Holy text. Updike shows that if faith is constructive it can be regained even in adverse circumstances.

Unlike the existential doubts and unsteady yearnings for salvation as seen in other characters Ahmad has absolute and unwavering faith. He hates the sexually permissive mores of other characters. He is ascetically pure. Ahmad attaches proper life with faith. Ahmad's pious way of life shows Updike's attraction towards pious living. He seems to suggest that this form of living can be a better alternative to take recourse to, in an age of anarchy and faithlessness. Self discipline, explained as a form of jihad by Ahmad, can be a solution to anarchy. Updike himself observes, "I like him because he's idealistic and trying to find the straight path in life" (Inskeep 3).

The next novel taken up in this chapter also deals with a kind of religious fanaticism. Ahmad of the novel *Terrorist* and Clark of the novel *In The Beauty of the Lilies* both are misguided.

In the Beauty of the Lilies is Updike's tractate on religion and American culture in the form of a saga of several generations of the Wilmot family in the backdrop of growing movie industry. The last part of the novel focuses on a character named Clark. "In Clark, Updike presents failure of the movies to provide an alternative to religion" (Gandolfo 174). Clark's mother Essie has name, fame, everything but a successful married life. She has a son named Clark. He has a neglected childhood. Clark is lured into terrorism. People resort to violence out of ambition, grievance, dejection, humiliation etc. Clark in a desperate attempt to find his own place in the world and to do something meaningful after a meaningless and shallow childhood joins a religious commune. "Religion not only binds its followers together but also provides them with a system of beliefs, rituals, institutions, traditions and a sense of sacred. It also gives meaning to their life and a way of relating themselves to the universe and its creator. In other words, it gives them a sense of divine" (Engineer 701). Here he comes under the spell of a sacrosanct preacher named Jesse Smith.

Religious fanaticism . . . means that spirit of religiosity which so controls its victims that it blinds their eyes to any other truths or

causes, natural, logical, or scientific. . . . Its victims are always one-ideaed men, their main virtue lies in the fact that they push one idea, their fault that they see nothing else in the world. (Leach 240)

Clark's yearning for faith lands him into a religious commune. The head of this rigid cult is a charismatic fundamentalist religious leader named Jesse Smith. A leader of a religious commune should be a person who is pious, religious, selfless and away from worldly pleasures but Jesse is just the opposite. Hannah introduces them to each other and Jesse says, "Sister Hannah always brings us congenial visitors. She has a fine eye for those to whom our company might prove a blessing" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 377). In the commune he is given the name of Esau but at his back the other members calls him Slick. Clark is initially impressed with Jesse and he says, "Human life to him is just a phase we're in. A preliminary phase. If he tells us, *Die*, we gladly will" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 427). But when Jesse asks Clark to kill a few women and children he realizes that Jesse is a hoax and this commune is a mental trap.

Clark's search for God is finally satisfied in the end of the novel. Clark realizes that Jesse wants to shoot the women and children and wants people like Jesse to assist. Instead Clark shoots Jesse and helps the others escape from Jesse's sinister plan. Clark is injured but he knows that he has risen in the eyes of God.

Though Clark is a part of the commune he knows the falsity of it. Clark is an antidote to the negativity of Jesse. Clark kills Jesse. "Clark . . . shot the false prophet twice, once in the chest and the second time in the top of the head. . . ." (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 484). Clark redeems his miserable life by saving others. Clark's life is not extraordinary but his death is no less than that of a martyr. "Clark . . . after wasting his life, dedicates himself to a religious cult and is killed when the fanatical leader, Jesse Smith, confronts the authorities" (Bellis 219). This becomes the breaking news of every channel and is heard by his mother Essie also. She feels aggrieved but appreciates his heroic deed. Clark eliminates Jesse at the cost of his own life which is indeed a great sacrifice. For Essie her son is no less than a hero who saves people from a psychopath. "Tears welled from beneath her closed lids. While her eyelids were still shut she prayed in the blood-tinged darkness they made, *Thank you, Lord*,

for letting my son become a hero at the end" (Updike *In the Beauty of the Lilies* 488). The news also reaches his grandfather Teddy. With this the annals of a family come to an end with the triumph of positivity over negativity.

Among the characters, on one hand there are Clarence and Teddy, an apostate and an agnostic and on the other hand there are Essie and Clark who have unwavering faith. Clark puts his faith in the wrong person and this realization makes him question the command of his leader. "In *In the Beauty of the Lilies* God is an animating force whose presence breathes light and hope into individuals, and whose absence deflates and renders them hollow" (Schiff "Updike's Domestic God" 62). Clark's death is regenerative. One life sacrificed to save more lives is worthy of emulation.

Both Jesse Smith and Shaikh Rashid use religion for their heinous crimes. Shaikh Rashid as well as Jesse are demagogues.

. . . Updike stresses that it is not some aberrant group of fanatics he has conjured from his imagination but an actual group straight from the headlines, the type of snare waiting for the Clarks of our world. For it is not only orthodox religions that tend toward authoritarianism, but, in fact, anytime some self-styled guru offers personal liberation and salvation, he or she can acquire excessive control of adherents. The Jesse Smiths . . . attract followers because of the vacuum created by the lack of moral authority in society. (Gandolfo 174)

Jesse's and Sheikh Rashid's pupils Clark and Ahmad think along humanitarian lines and save lives of innocent people. Ahmad does not fall prey to the evil intentions of his teacher. It may be due to Ahmad's invocation for the right time. Ahmad has incorruptible sense of justice. Clark and Ahmad are guided by positive energies. The only difference is that Ahmad survives whereas Clark dies. Clark commits homicide. And it is justified as it prevents greater harm to innocents. Jesse was an imminent threat to the life and wellbeing of the laity. If Jesse would have been left alive, he would have endangered lives of more innocent people in future.

There can be multiple interpretations and effects of faith. Faith can have two-pronged effects. Faith can be a constructive as well as destructive force. Faith can act as a bulwark against destructive forces depending on the use to which it is put. It is exploited by some people to create terror in the world and to make schisms amongst people. Faith can lead to extremities if interpreted negatively and if interpreted positively it can have a healing effect, it can alleviate sense of insecurity and frustration. It can give a sense of security and satisfaction in times of loneliness. Ahmad and Clark interpret faith positively whereas their guides interpret faith negatively. Ahmad and Clark listen to their inner voices because faith is all about inner voice and individuality. Hence, Shaikh Rashid and Jesse as external forces who fail to influence their pupils. Although they are led to the brink of destruction by their destructive guides, but faith acts as a guiding principle and saves them from becoming murderers. Faith which is for the wellbeing of people may become a cause for their destruction. Faith should be coupled with constructive thinking so that it can be utilized as a positive force.

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Conclusion

CONCLUSION

After reading Updike's novels with faith as a thematic underpinning, it is evident that to Updike, faith is the foundation upon which religion and domestic life rests. Updike realistically "describes a fallen world seldom aided by the Bible or clergy" (Bellis 275). He explores the vacuum left by dwindling faith that once acted as an integrative force for the society. At the same time, the difficulty of holding onto faith suffuses his books. Faith works at individual as well as social level. In form of social institutions faith demands from an individual a level of selflessness and a sense of responsibility.

Thus, faith sometimes causes conflict between individual thinking and desires and social demands. ". . . Updike is concerned with human needs vs. society's demands" (Gingher 101). The fictive world of Updike is peopled with the characters struggling to climb up the social ladder, carry out the family obligation on one hand and living with throes of the search for meaning and God at the same time, on the other. Updike successfully illustrates the introspective struggles of his protagonists. He is concerned with the stuffiness, disillusionment and ambivalence pervasive in America. The characters are representative of Americans. Boswell says that, ". . . the true American hero is the average citizen, in isolation, shut up in the solitude of his/her own heart. This, for Updike, is the essence of the democratic hero; as opposed to the traditional hero of aristocratic societies. . . . The individual in contemplation of himself: that is the heart of Updike's American ideal" (*John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy: Mastered Irony in Motion* 235).

Faith as a force works at individual as well as social level. Socially, institutions play crucial role en route faith, marriage and church being two powerful institutions that makes an attempt to maintain order, however skewed it may be. An individual may turn his back on or fight against the institutions with a variety of intentions. A social or religious rebel may be guided or misguided by rational, independent thinking as it may happen when science is pitted against religion or s/he may be guided by one's selfish hedonistic pursuits when s/he may shirk social

responsibilities. Examples of the first case are Clarence and Sarah P. Worth, while Tom Marshfield and Rabbit are examples of the second variety.

Through the lives of Updike's characters it is evidenced that faith is in a state of crisis life seems absurd. Faith alleviates absurdity. Sometimes the reason for the loss of faith, as mentioned earlier, is scientific reading and sometimes the reason is to get rid of insipid life. Characters go on a quest. Updike places his protagonists within a predicament that instigate them to respond in a variety of ways. Thus, Rabbit responds by fleeing away. Rabbit's act of running is the manifestation of a conscious refusal to lead a disappointed life.

Updike's fiction provides a detailed study of our bodies and the world in which we live, his prose illustrating and celebrating the intricacies of our existence. "What matters . . . is a recognition of what Updike's work, taken as a whole, comes to – namely "the unfolding of a self, over, a career of books." Moreover . . . the unfolding of that self has been also the unfolding of a society and a nation . . ." (Pinsker 333). Updike's characters are solipsistic. They are found locked up in their solitude.

Religious or *irreligious* ambience permeates throughout his novels. For Updike, fiction and theology are not separate. Updike says, "I think that theology is very much a part of our fictional fabric. It's very hard to write fiction without having some sort of religious sense. . . . We all have some religious need . . ." (Bailey 65). In Updike's novels, religion is often exposed as insufficient to meet the demands of an individual in the present sterile society. In the absence of social and religious inhibitions, sexual promiscuity becomes a part of self-revelation, a substitute for God. The modern world as Updike sees it is superfluous, but not a world of fulfillment.

In his novels, God is not present in the day today life. "At the very end of this lengthiest of the Rabbit books, Rabbit still seems merely resigned to the silence of God . . ." (Neary 108). God is not on the same plane as humans but He is on an entirely different plane.

Updike's focus on the complex implications of his characters' moral decisions is constant and sharp, so that the issues are always

clear and the consequences of each decision fully developed. But while Updike's characters are quick to judge each other, their creator refuses either to bless or to condemn; and each novel clearly demonstrates that the specific moral problem it treats is irresolvable. The world Updike creates in his fiction is morally ambiguous. (Schopen 526)

The characters may have judgmental attitude towards each other and even the consequences of their actions affect them, but as an author Updike neither rewards nor punishes his characters. "Updike, however, believes that there are no solutions. And he specifically rejects the notion that literature should inculcate moral principles or precepts" (Schopen 526). His emphasis is on the unresolved tension which is mark of American fiction.

Updike does send his protagonists . . . on quests, presumably for identity, for a means to square themselves with the enigmatic universe. He confronts them with all the temptations both of flesh and spirit which the questing hero must face, with all the problems and the myriad solutions to them. But he is only nominally concerned with bringing his protagonists through successfully – or even unsuccessfully. His real concern is a critical examination of the temptations, the problems, the questions, and the answers as they conflict both inside and outside the protagonist, alternately promising and denying solutions to the quest. (Waldmeir 16)

The tinge of existential gloom pervades the novels and despite the characters' acceptance of the inherent ambiguity of human existence, they are willing to seek sexual adventure in order to overcome feeling of ennui and tedium of the predictable. ". . . such a character as Rabbit Angstrom is a "questing man," one who is "embarking on a quest for his real self" . . . the quest succeeds *because* it fails, negation is affirmation, Passage is Failure, hopelessness is joyful" (Waldmeir 15).

The view of life which is fostered by the new ideas prove catastrophic for the society in general and the institution of religion and marriage in particular. In his fiction ". . . the "upright life" of a faithful marriage and righteousness *per se* are

threatened by instinctual desires” (Gingher 101). There is a moral and spiritual vacuum in contemporary American life and therefore the characters grope for religious experience. “Updike offers an unconventional description of how the movies have replaced the churches as respites for spiritual renewal by describing the appeal of films to the defeated Wilmot and showing how Alma’s fixation with film stars led her to satisfy others in her screen roles” (Bellis 221). Movies have been seen as substitute for religiosity by the protagonists in the novel *In the Beauty of the Lilies*. “The novel [*In the Beauty of the Lilies*] is important for its direct treatment of the problem of spiritual disillusionment, something Updike’s other ministers had suffered and for its demonstrated connection between the religious impulse and the attraction of the movies” (Bellis 219).

Through his fiction Updike conveys, “. . . with science having diminished faith, human beings feel more insignificant than ever and need an otherworldly point of reference that the church provides” (Coates 11). Updike maintains that;

But all church services have this wonderful element: People with other things to do get up on a Sunday morning, put on good clothes and assemble out of nothing but faith. . . . Simply as a human gathering I find it moving, reassuring and even inspiring. A church is a little like a novel in that both are saying there’s something very important about being human. (Sanoff “Writers Are Really Servants of Reality” 182)

Updike’s novels do not only talk about churches but says enough for love and faith. We find that “. . . Updike’s heroes often discover that intimacy involves disappointment, that love is itself transitory, and that the search for permanence may hinder life” (Samuels 9). He scrutinizes moral questions associated with eros. Updike has “. . . filled his fiction with characters who struggle in one way or another with belief and has offered their stories to the postmodern world as both representatives of that world and as signs of hope for it. His fictional characters are also figures searching for the validation that love, exercised in freedom, offers” (Coates 239). For Updike, both these qualities are essential for living life with goodness but unfortunately both these qualities of faith and love are not sufficiently found in the

lives of Americans. "Lacking the support of faith, Updike's modern heroes can neither accept man's contingency nor find permanence through the world" (Samuels 27). Updike's fiction is rooted in the ethos of contemporary America. "In tracing Updike's moral and theological debates, four interconnected principles have emerged as constants throughout his work. For Updike: accurate presentation of reality is essential; faith, though problematic, is essential; love, as both ideal and experience, is essential; goodness is possible" (Coates 240).

Updike believes that life is ambiguous. There is no final resolution. Updike has

. . . a dialectical approach to religious issues in which defining oppositions do not resolve into a satisfying synthesis but rather remain in sustained tension and ambiguity, a philosophical and theological standpoint that Updike quickly seized upon as consistent with his own attempt to treat religious matters in fiction in such a way as to avoid the sort of all-encompassing generalizations that would otherwise destroy the delicate particularizing that literature demands." (Boswell "Updike, religion, and the novel of moral debate" 43)

He holds up a fictional mirror in which a faithful representation of human life, with its complicated, ambiguous moral choices, offers readers the possibility for self-reflection and for insight into themselves. Updike ". . . has presented man in an endless, cyclic battle with stakes to be taken seriously: man's salvation will be determined by the solemnness with which he lives his life – his redemption will be measured by his truth to himself in this life and possibly by his hopes for the next life" (Muradian 584). There is religious and moral depth animating his descriptions. "Updike finds God in the material elements and events of our world, in everything from furniture, golf and carpet fuzz to rain, light, gardens and sexual intimacy. Updike's ability to "depict the tangible, visible world with great fidelity" and find within that loving accretion of detail the integrated, if illusive, presence of Divine Being clearly attests to his artistic achievement" (Morey and Ann-Janine 2).

As a writer, Updike's unique capacity is to depict middle class, ordinary, unremarkable people engaged in struggle befitting heroism. The power of faith is also expressed, to use Italic's words, through "the extremes of earthly desire and spiritual zealotry, whether the comic philandering of the preacher in *A Month of Sundays* or the steady rage of the young Muslim in *Terrorist*" (2). Updike has always been frank about both the material as well as the spiritual aspects of ordinary human existence. "Existence itself does not feel horrible, it feels like an ecstasy, rather, which we only have to be still to experience. Habit and accustomedness have painted over pure gold with a dull paint that can, however, be scratches away, to reveal the shining under base. The world is good" (Updike "On Being a Self Forever" 230).

Updike's protagonists are torn between the gratification of carnal desires on one hand and the satiation of spiritual yearnings on the other, with such hopeless intensity that it is almost impossible for them to choose one, which is a cause of a crisis in faith.

Whether it is the case of Rabbit Angstrom or Tom Marshfield, the families of both men do not remain completely unaffected by their loss of faith or their impulsive decisions. In Updike's novels, the loss of faith is accompanied by grief it causes for its victims as well as for families.

Updike essentially deals with middle class American characters and milieu. Updike's fiction has avoided focusing on explicit social problems and instead has concentrated on the quotidian experiences of everyday. "Updike is often praised as the cartographer of the American middle, mapping the trajectory of the tropes of masculinity and marriage in their steady deterioration" (Webb "John Updike and waning of mainline Protestantism" 7).

Updike talks of faith as well as ethics. He analyzes the problems associated with faith as well ethics. To deal with faith is difficult yet absolute, whereas dealing with the ethics involves ambiguity as ethics is defined relatively. "The absolute qualitative difference between man and God, and consequently between ethics and faith, is the sine qua non of his theology. . . . The problem of faith, though difficult, is simple and absolute; those of morality are relative, ambiguous, and "basically insoluble"" (Schopen 525-526).

The characters attempt to give religious meaning to their sexual acts. “. . . Updike brings to his fiction an indissoluble ambivalence about religious belief, consistently – and often ironically – depicting faith as a complex psychological dynamic constituted of such markedly unspiritual components as egotism, aestheticism, destructive impulses and sexuality” (Bailey 44). These characteristics or psychological states determine the mental processes faith has to go through. As discussed earlier selfless and selfish renunciation of faith may both be linked with egotism, love for beauty, negative thinking, sadism and hedonism.

The protagonists appeal to the readers because the readers too might hail from the same social class, same social milieu, engaged in egotistical, aesthetic or ordinary aspirations and struggles of life. Updike pleads “. . . that an imperfect man may still, as a priest, administer the sacraments and further the faith” (Coates 248).

Updike describes society's typical individual. “In fact, he consistently presents us characters who represent life lived on the boundary between heaven and earth” (Coates 13). The two alternatives, one of ordinary human life and the other of transcendental experience are unable to satisfy the protagonists putting faith in a state of crisis. “Neither of the alternatives offers a satisfactory direction for the quest – the one because it is too shallow and earth-centered, the other because it is so unearthly as to be incapable of articulation or even of attainment. The conflict, in whatever terms it be cast, remains irresolvable . . . his intention [is] merely to portray the conflict without resolving it . . .” (Waldmeir 18). Updike deals with human needs and society's demands. “. . . Updike portrays his American citizens as set in direct interaction not so much with society as with God. His characters—Rabbit in particular — are less in conflict with the cultural order than with their own subjective impulses” (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy; Mastered Irony in Motion* 234). Updike wants his novels to reflect the fact that human behavior is always ambiguous. Updike asserts,

“Rather than arrive at a verdict or a directive, I sought to present sides of an unresolvable tension intrinsic to being human. Readers who expect novelists to reward and punish and satirize their characters from a superior standpoint will be disappointed.” That

insistence upon the “unresolvable tension intrinsic to being human” is not only the most important component of the theological vision articulated in the Rabbit novels but also the very heart of what is meant by “Updikean.” (Boswell *John Updike Rabbit Tetralogy; Mastered Irony in Motion* 233)

Updikean tension is intrinsic to human existence which makes his works more profound. The “. . . study of Updike’s fiction fails if it loses sight of the profoundly dark human spiritual drama . . .” (Bailey 26). Notions about the past, love, and faith are apparent throughout his work. “. . . erosion of his characters belief in a God-centered Universe has inspired Updike’s most substantial and resonant fiction” (Bailey 43).

Dealing with faith and writing about its erosion, tracing the progress of malady, with an attempt to avoid being judgmental, sometimes Updike ends up in blasphemy. “Writing, in making the world light – in codifying, distorting, prettifying, verbalizing it – approaches blasphemy” (Updike “On Being a Self Forever” 226).

His artful accumulation of meticulously rendered detail for spiritual and moral thoughtfulness is remarkable. “Updike’s belief does not distinguish him from his postmodern contemporaries who work out of despair. As a writer he leaps out of that despair with his faith that there is goodness and that it is worth searching” (Coates 248). He explores the hidden depths of religious faith as well as doubt. He says,

Insofar as I have Christian faith, it has helped me as a writer, keeping me from becoming unduly obsessed by commercial or critical success. Writing is, after all, an otherworldly thing to do – for rewards that may or may not be material. I try to write the best book I know how, rather than to write a best seller. This, in a way, relates to having faith that things will work out, that there is purpose to your life. . . . We are servants, basically, of reality, aren’t we? We are trying to get a little piece of it into print. (Sanoff “Writers Are Really Servants of Reality” 182)

Religious faith, as Updike claims, is what provides him with some incentive in writing novels. “. . . Updike can be called a religious writer. He might best be called a writer of religious fictions which are credible because they are ambiguous and paradoxical” (Martin 110). But at times the ambiguity which is the essence of his fiction invites criticism also.

Many of Updike's readers find the moral ambiguity of his fictional world morally offensive. His refusal to establish a rigid and clearly discernible moral perspective from which his characters should be viewed often leads these readers to assert that Updike is unwilling or unable to deal with serious moral issues, that he has "nothing to say." The objective presentation of life's pervasive ambiguity also leads many of his sympathetic critics to misread him; they simply assume that Updike shares their own moral attitudes, or those associated with Christianity in general, and interpret his fiction accordingly. (Schopen 527)

Updike's realism is such that he simply describes the state of affairs which may be bleak or optimistic. He discusses disintegration of values that may be a result of loss of faith. Nevertheless, Updike's style tries to establish a link between the physical and the spiritual worlds and attach importance to moral values as a part of overall responsible behavior of an individual.

Since Updike's concern often deals with the relation between the physical and spiritual experience, his use of metaphor reflects this concern and conveys it to the reader. Metaphorical language is, after all, an assertion that a reality exists beyond the literal . . . Updike's use of metaphor often reflects a religious analogue, reinforcing his view of "the world as layered, and as there being something up there." Thus for Updike the literary experience imitates the wished-for theological experience, in which the image exists as an incarnation of the author's intention. In other words, by his repeated use of metaphorical language, Updike is voicing

the hope that the connection between the physical and spiritual worlds can be made. (Uphaus 133-134)

It is this quality and striving in Updike that is praised by the critics. Gilmore admiringly speaks of Updike in these words, "I have yet to encounter another writer whose prolific output more accurately surveys, both in pointed detail and in psychological depth, the striving angst and the all – too – ephemeral ecstasies of modern, suburban and mostly God – fearing America." (Gilmore 2)

As far as his style of writhing is concerned, I disagree with the critics who believe that he writes in detail because he doesn't have much to say. "Inhabiting the most literate, permissive, and affluent society in the history of the world, the American writer ought to be a contended and well-fed craftsman. But perhaps his many birthrights have been as much handicap as advantage" (Updike "The Plight of the American Writer" 36). If his fiction would have lacked the vital thought content, it could not have made him won an array of awards.

What is often mistaken as a pretentious style is merely Updike's "noncommittal luminosity of fact," his objective amplification of surface detail and his particular and express refusal to preach to the readers. Updike as we have seen, is very much concerned with "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself." But he deals not so much with individual psychologies as with an aggregate portrayal of the human condition. If his characters are often on the psychological level emotionally jejune, as focal points for the human paradox they are ample. Not only the "little congruencies and arabesques" of his prose but his social commentary, too, places him squarely within the first rank of contemporary writers." (Gingher 105)

Updike's choice of themes mostly receives acclaim from readers as well as from critics. His works often explore the relationship between human obsession with money and sex leading to the erosion of value system. He succeeds in situating the supposed mundane existential questions and angst of ordinary folks within the great theological problem of modernity.

I would add that what strikes me as remarkable about Updike's meticulously documented love affair with quotidian life is that it leads more often to celebration and a broad smile than to America bashing and a sour puss. This quality has not endeared him to those serious writers who regard his popular success with suspicion or those who willfully confuse his characters (and their attitudes about sexuality, religion, or whatever) with his own. (Pinsker 332-333)

Updike share a preoccupation with several other important related concerns such as materialism, death, guilt, sin, sports, work, lust, penance, defective clergy, anguish and meaninglessness of life. His knowledge of religious scriptures namely Bible, Quran and Upanishads is marvelous which makes his work relevant vis a vis the question of faith and moral action. "Throughout his work Updike supplies abundant quotations from . . . sacred books . . ." (Bellis 239). In other words, "Updike's knowledge of the Bible and related writing is obvious throughout his work" (Bellis 377).

Updike deals with the subject of faith in his novels. The term in his novels is not confined to ecclesiastical faith. When it comes to relationships, the faith comes to be known as trust and is synonymous with loyalty also. Updike describes how and why faith, in its various avatars, is lost by the protagonists and whether it is ever regained by them. His novels reflect the fact that faith in the wrong person leads to disillusionment and leaving one's faith gives rise to a life of meaninglessness. Sometimes the protagonists regain their lost faith. But all this does not imply any kind of imposition on Updike's part. He refuses the label of Christian writer.

The conflict between doubt and faith remains irreconcilable. Sometimes the doubt overcomes faith and sometimes the doubt stimulates faith. "In other words, the debate, as in all of Updike's best work, remains in the end open, dynamic, still restlessly in play" (Boswell "Updike, religion, and the novel of moral debate." 56).

Updike takes up issues in his novels that are presented as they are. Updike believes that the world could not be different from what it is and should be accepted as it is. It is left to the readers to infer what they want to. The aim of Updike's works

is to engage readers in an existential debate. "Updike has said that the central theme of each of his novels is "meant to be a moral dilemma," and that his books are intended as "moral debates with the reader." But to develop a moral theme in such a way that there is no resolution is to do something quite different from what the novel has traditionally attempted" (Schopen 526). Nothing is forced upon the readers because Updike is set out to write and not to preach. Updike ". . . isn't a moralist. Though his characters may raise moral questions, Updike avoids unequivocal answers. One cannot extrapolate from his fiction a code of values . . ." (Samuels 9). Another conclusion that can be derived is that in this materialistic world, solace can be found only in faith, be it faith in human relationships, human goodness or God's presence.

The theme of Crisis of Faith is a major theme and one of the most important themes in his fiction. "John Updike's compelling fiction dramatizes his protagonist's loss of religious faith and the personal consequences of that loss" (Bailey 43).

The conflict or the clash is at the centre of his novels. "The clash between ethics and inner call to faith staged in Kierkegaard's *Fear and Trembling* . . . has remained, perhaps, the central conflict in his work, while Barth's serenely Wholly Other God continues to preside over Updike's work . . ." (Boswell "Updike, religion, and the novel of moral debate." 46). Endowed with an alert thinking and inquisitively probing mind Updike underwent the angst of Spiritual Crisis. He struggled to come out of it with peace and turned to Kierkegaard and then Karl Barth.

Although John Updike's own life has been the major source of inspiration for his work, his style and approach have a number of literary antecedents. Updike's theological and philosophical ideas grow out of his enthusiasm for the work of the Danish philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, whose books *Fear and Trembling* and *Either/Or* provided Updike with a way to square his religious beliefs with his intellectual ambitions. Updike is also a fierce proponent of the 20th century theologian Karl Barth, whose book *The Word of God and the Word of Man* Updike credits with

helping him overcome a bout of depression and spiritual doubt that seized him in his early thirties. (Sharp 1350)

One of Updike's major character Harry Angstrom's faith also reflects the inspiration from Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. "Harry's stalwart adherence to deeply rooted, traditionally God-centered faith – simplistic and childlike as it is – is consistent with the teachings of Kierkegaard and Karl Barth, two of Updike's acknowledged mentors. Both believe that individual religious feeling must be grounded in empirical truth, and both stress the need for acknowledging the existence of Deity" (Searles 72).

Since faith "is not merely believing that something is true, it is being prepared to act upon that belief, and relying upon it" (McGrath), the characters in Updike's novels fail to act upon their faith which makes them feel disloyal.

Faith is not only believing those things which we can see or which can be proved because faith can be there when there is no proof or no scientific explanation. "Yet it must be said that we do quite reasonably believe some claims in the face of strong contrary evidence, and this is indeed, as Kierkegaard said, a test of our faith" (Quine and Ullian 61).

As far as Updike's novels are concerned it shows that,

Faith then is a solitary thing, yet the only thing that can combat the fear of nothingness. Deeds and morality cannot. . . . Yet faith cannot give certainty nor can it even remotely protect the individual from the dilemma of humanity. Therefore, faith for Updike always has a tentative quality. . . . There is, however, enough faith in Updike's fiction to approach life as if there were a blessing to be gained." (Coates 241)

While I hope that I have drawn a broad sketch and outline of Updike's novels, in order to keep my work within the limit of this thesis, I have selected novels whose focus is on the crisis of faith the characters suffer from. My work has dealt with various aspects of humanity as revealed by John Updike in his novels, especially the

bourgeois, their daily struggle; the value system they adhere to, the precarious ways in which they do it, and the threats that weaken it. Its main focus is to transverse the stages through which his characters go in grappling their ideal of religious faith, and to depict their attempts and the imperfect nature of their regaining faith which was once lost in a bumpy journey of material pursuit. "If future generations continue to read and value Updike's oeuvre . . . it will be because more than the work of any other American writer of his era, his most resonant fiction has devoted itself to the anatomization of America's evolution from a Christian to post Christian culture and to the dramatization of the individual human cost of that spiritual transition" (Bailey 43). After much painful self-examination, the protagonists in the novels, considered in my work, realize that it is impossible to return to that Utopia where marriages withstood tribulation and Americans were fighting for a common goal and people's faith was not overshadowed by evil. In the novels Updike examines a variety of attempts to find a meaningful substitute to Christian faith which now seems abandoned. The climax of the novels suggests that any attempt to find such a substitute to the Christian faith is futile.

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